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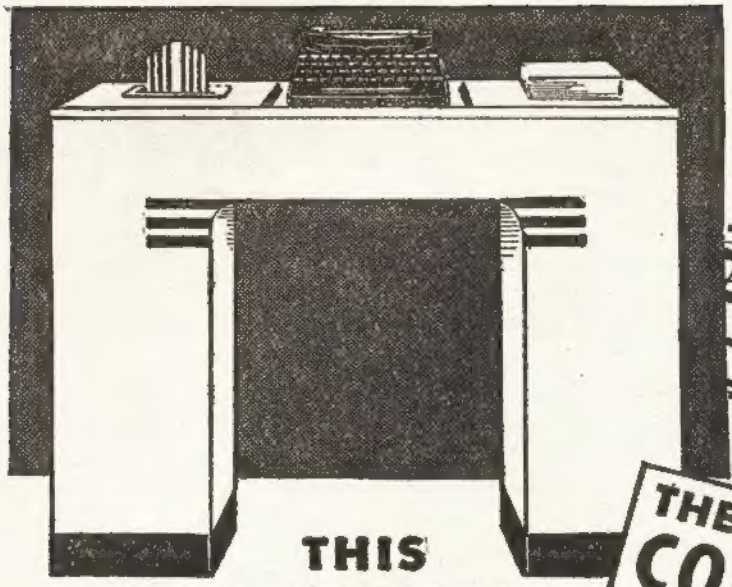

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Giants of Anarchy

By EANDO BINDER

An amazing glimpse into the future, when the world has become a weird land of anarchy in which there are no laws, but everyone for himself, and the devil take the hindmost

THE power tubes had warmed up and all was in readiness. Don Jones puffed slowly at his cigarette. He cherished the smoke in his lungs, knowing it might be the last inhaling he would ever do. He wondered if they would know of cigarettes in that distant future to which he was going.

"Don't hurry yourself," said Professor White at the control board. "I want to run the system at full load for five minutes yet to make sure everything is all right. Are you nervous?"

"No," denied Don Jones, but the hand that held the cigarette shook. It was not quite as easy as he had thought—leaving the life and time he knew. But because recurrent epilepsy had made life miserable for him, he had consented to be the subject of Professor White's experiment. Young, and healthy in all other ways, Don Jones wished at this last minute that he were free of his promise.

"I'm nervous myself," admitted the professor, dabbing at knife switches with fluttery fingers to make certain they were firmly closed. "I almost feel as though I were about to become your murderer."

"Forget it," grunted Don. "I had no peace in this life. I've thought of suicide, but this is better."

"Not suicide," said the scientist, turning around. "You can't compare this to death, Don. You are going to a new life, but without dissolution. You are really going to be a time-traveler. Your body and mind—and soul, if there is such a thing—will be projected into a future age—anywhere from ten to a hundred thousand years ahead; I can't be sure just how far."

"Doesn't make any difference," said Don indifferently. "I just want to get—and get far. Epilepsy is an awful thing for a man with pride to have. Maybe in that future age I'll have a good time while I last."

Professor White went back to his dials and controls. He looked them over with pride. He was the first scientist to construct an atomic-vibration analyzer. With the complicated machine he had taken apart—not atom by atom, but vibration by vibration—a wide variety of inanimate things.

He had tried cats and rats in the past year, too, and had made them "come back" after a week of a month.

"The process," as he had explained to Don several times, "is one of slowing down atomic vibration and making it static. The object is then non-existent to all practical purposes. All matter, all life—all the universe!—is made up of vibration. The flow of time is a decrease of the vibration rate. Change the vibration rate by any measurable amount and the subject 'falls' into a new time. My cat subject, for instance, had its vibration rate lowered to a certain point. It disappeared. It was out of our time. But when the universe had 'caught up' with it, there was Tabby, alive and unharmed. The interval was a week. By feeding my coils more power, I can make the interval much longer—there is no limit, except how much electricity I can afford to use.

"This discovery of mine leads to the curious conclusion that at some time the whole universe will reach zero vibration, like an unwinding clock-spring. But it will take ten trillion years! A stopped vibration being no vibration at all, ten trillion years from now the universe will be—nothing! Just plain nothing."

But Don Jones had never troubled himself about the scientific angle of the experiment. It was his concern to get out of a life that had grown irksome to him, because of hereditary epilepsy. One got tired of living a life of gaps and jumps of hours' duration, and sometimes days'.

His cigarette burned short. "I say, Professor, what am I likely to find there in the future?"

"Plenty that's strange," vouchsafed the scientist. "A new civilization, perhaps a world state—highly-advanced science—cheap power—interplanetary travel—mile-high buildings—applied telekinesis—oh, I don't know. You will be the one to find out."

DON tossed his cigarette stub to the floor and ground it under his heel. With a quick motion he slipped off his shoes and flung the bathrobe from his shoulders. He stood naked.

"Okay," he snapped. Without another word he stepped before a towering apparatus with many vacuum-tubes and wires. In the center was a tall, upright glass jar, large enough to enclose a man. It was suspended by wires four feet above a porcelain slab. Don stooped, clambered onto the smooth dais, and straightened up with his head and shoulders inside the huge jar.

Professor White stepped to a crank handle. "Good luck!" he called. Then he slipped a ratchet and allowed the crank handle to turn slowly. The huge bell-jar descended over Don till its lower end rested on the porcelain slab. The young man was now surrounded by glass.

Don stared out through the flawless crystal, amazed at his own calmness. He saw the professor, white of face, motioning to him. What did he want? Was the damned fool asking him, with gestures, if he wanted to come out again? Don shook his head, cursing inwardly at the silly delay. Why should the professor be losing his nerve? He had everything he wanted —a chance to measure the vibration rate of the human brain as it went through the analyzer. And there should be no trouble afterward; Don had turned over to him his death certificate, absolutely legal even though the "dead" man had come to life after the epileptic fit which had occasioned its use.

At last the scientist turned, with a visible sigh of resignation, to his controls. He threw a switch. Immediately a strong violet light bathed the naked man in the large glass tube. The hum of powerful vibration sang through the glass, and Don felt faint. From overhead and two sides came shafts of writhing color. And with the color came pain—a slow ache that seemed to be pouring into him from his prickling skin. The laboratory scene outside became hazy.

Suddenly Don was startled out of the intense lethargy which had come over him. With his hand on the last switch—the one that would send Don hurtling into the future—Professor White had turned to the door. Don saw an indistinct white figure run to the scientist and pull frantically at his arm. The scientist resisted, talked to the white figure, bobbing his gray head vehemently, and then reached again for the final switch.

Don's thoughts were extremely muddled. The colored, singing lights had shaken him half unconscious with their atom vibrations. He saw, as in a dream, the white figure staring at him. What did *she* want? Why did Elaine White—the girl he loved —stare at him in such a wild, beseeching way? Could she be calling him back?

Don smiled bitterly. Too late now. Because of her he had taken this fearful step out of time. They had been lovers, vowing eternal devotion. Then his epilepsy had spoiled it, for it would have gone down in his children—in *her* children! Losing her, life had meant nothing more to Don. That was why he was in this tube now, waiting for the final surge of powerful forces to take him out of her sight. Don groaned, for he could see her love for him staring out of her eyes. God! If only things had been different!

For one eternal instant the scene froze before his eyes. Professor White, with a hand on the ebony switch handle, slowly swinging it over, watching his dials. Elaine —dear girl!—eyes streaming tears, gazing forlornly in his direction. Then there was a soundless concussion, a furious wrenching of the entire universe—and blackness. . . .

Don's mind whirled up through jumbled impressions like a straw twisting

in a whirlpool. What did this mean? —tall trees on every side of him! Then he remembered and sprang to his feet.

He found himself on a little hillock overgrown with coarse grasses. On all sides loomed a forbidding wall of jungle-like forest, steaming in the hot summer sun. Far in one direction were the white peaks of mountains. Look as he might, he could see nothing of buildings or a city. Well —that was not so strange. But mountains here in Kansas—how could that be? For Professor White had stated that he would materialize—or rather, the universe would slow down to his vibration rate—in exactly the same spot he had left.

How strange! On this spot, then, thousands of years before, had stood the laboratory. The jungle had then been a city. Those mountains had been prairie land. How the world had changed! And the people he had known were dust. Elaine was but a memory!

There came a loud roar from the bottom of the little hill. Don was startled to see a great lion-like creature standing there, its green eyes glittering at him. Lions in Kansas, too! Yet it was not a lion, being much larger, and thick-furred like a bear.

The animal bounded halfway up the slope and crouched, swishing its long tail. Don stood in a hypnosis of fear. Should he run? But how hopeless to think of outrunning that sleek, smooth-muscled machine! Was his gamble with an unknown future to be ended in one bloody moment? So it seemed, as the beast tensed its great muscles for a leap.

At that moment a faint crashing sound came from near by. The lion creature twitched its ears, eased back on its haunches, then leaped away with an ear-splitting roar. The next moment Don saw the cause of the disturbance. A cyclopean half-round object on six long legs of jointed steel was crashing through the jungle, bowling over trees as though they had been sticks. It was no less than fifty feet high and shook the ground as the metal plates at the ends of the jointed legs moved rhythmically up and forward and down.

The machine stopped. The housing barely cleared the tops of the trees. Then Don heard a thunderous sound and down from the cloudless sky swooped a cylindrical object, like a meteor. Silently—the noise had just been the shriek of disrupted air—the airship circled the motionless walking machine.

Suddenly it seemed that ten cannon had all begun at once. Searing flashes of light swept over the jungle land. Don instinctively threw himself flat. The smell of singed wood permeated the air. Tremendous shocks ran through the ground. Jagged tree trunks, huge boulders and pieces of flying metal swept through the air.

It was over in a minute, and the sun smiled down again on peace and quiet. Don arose to see the house on legs lumbering in his direction. Two of its motor appendages dangled brokenly, and one smooth side of the housing was blackened and dented. Apparently, in the battle of giants, it had been victorious, for the airship was nowhere to be seen.

Like a nightmare creature the machine stalked up, flicking trees aside disdainfully, and paused at the foot of the slope. It seemed to stare at the naked man speculatively. A horrible thought struck Don. Maybe the thing was just a machine—a soulless, thinking being of metal! Anything was possible in this distant age to which he had come from thousands of years back in Time.

THE machine approached close, its five-foot bottom plates sinking a foot into the hard ground from the great weight

above. Don could now hear the faint sound of gears and wheels. What did the incredible iron monster want? Was it going to crush him flat with one of its great foot-plates, in sheer mechanical pitilessness? A huge foot came up, loomed over him. Then it eased to the ground not a yard away.

Don felt some invisible force grasp him gently and lift him off the ground. Up and up he went. A sliding panel opened beside the aperture from which the lifting force came, and his shoulders were thrust up through the bottom of the hanging car. Two soft hands grasped Don's.

They were human hands and they helped him erect in the lighted interior of the strange walking craft. Standing on cushioned flooring, surrounded by a bewildering maze of queer apparatus, Don turned to face his rescuer. He was a man like himself, but with a smaller body and a larger head. The lips were thin and small, the nose pinched, the large skull practically hairless. He was dressed in a gaudy outfit with spangles of bright jeweled ornaments. His eyes were large and reflected a deep curiosity.

The stranger spoke first; Don shook his head. The language did not even remotely resemble English. Don then tried his language on the other, without result. The curiosity in the stranger's eyes grew greater; he muttered something to himself.

At this moment a buzzing sound came from the complicated control mechanism of the walking car. The vehicle's lone pilot swung around and peered at dials over which little lights were winking. Suddenly his long delicate fingers jabbed at the controls. Don felt the housing sway forward. Through a large window he could see tree tops swishing by. The incredible thing, like a sentient iron giant, was stalking through the jungle land that stretched limitlessly in every direction. Considering its tremendous size, and the crude means of locomotion, its progress was amazingly smooth.

Don, inexplicably tired from his journey through time, felt his eyes grow heavy. The subdued whining of gears and cogs acted as a lullaby. As in a daze he sank to a soft couch against one wall and sleep overcame him.

WHEN he awoke, Don had the strange feeling that something had happened to him while he was asleep. Wondering, he noticed his friend of a day was gone. He was startled till he saw that the trapdoor in the center of the housing was open.

Don stepped to the opening, peered down. The vehicle was motionless, four of its spidery steel appendages spread widely. Looking for the other two, which he remembered had been damaged in the battle with the strange silent airship, Don saw his mysterious friend perched halfway down the length of one. Around his body was a peculiar harness to which were attached several strange apparatuses.

Don wondered if he could be dreaming, for the man was hanging in thin air! He was pointing at the metal beam of the leg a small nozzle from which streamed blue powder—blue powder that filled a gash in the steel as rapidly and solidly as though being welded on! In a few seconds it was done, no sign of the previous damage visible. Don saw that both crippled legs had been repaired completely.

Now the man who wielded such miraculous apparatus touched a finger to his harness. Like a feather he arose, supported by nothing tangible. He slung his harness onto a hook on the wall, after ascending to the interior of the cabin, and faced Don, smiling pleasantly.

"There wasn't much to repair after all," he said in perfect English, "although I thought by the way it started I would lose

all my car's legs completely. I mean that battle I had yesterday with Algy-A-23. But he was no match for me. I gave him a little ZY beam on his power unit. That's the second time I've defeated him."

Don stared. "You—you speak—English?" he stammered.

"Sure, as well as you do, now. It's a queer language, but it will do. Your name is Don Jones and mine Tosto, with a number that means nothing to you. And I'm curious to know, strange man with the strange mind, where you are from and how you came into *Anarchy*. Are you one of the Degenerates? But then you don't look particularly atavistic. Puzzled that you could not speak the language that has been on earth for ten thousand years, I used hypno-2Y-beam on you while you slept and recorded the language with which your mind thinks. I know you are from a past age, but how have you survived for those long eons?"

"I didn't *survive*," answered Don haltingly. "My vibration rate was slowed down to correspond with this present time."

The other's high smooth brow furrowed. "Vibration rate! What can you know of that? It is one of the lost secrets!"

"I don't really know anything about it," admitted Don. "But it was through that that I was projected into the future. If Professor White were here——"

Thereupon Don told of Professor White and his pioneer researches in wave mechanics, how the old but brilliant scientist had stumbled upon a great discovery—that all matter, all life, all the universe, was made up of vibration; that the flow of time was simply a decrease of the vibration rate.

Before Don realized it, while the stranger listened attentively, he told his own personal story—of his recurrent epilepsy, his love for Elaine White, his consenting to become the subject of Professor White's experiment, allowing himself to be catapulted into the future by having his vibration rate greatly decreased.

"It was for the best," finished Don with a forlorn tone. "I was furthering the cause of science, and at the same time solving my own—and Elaine's—problems."

"What a strange time you lived in!" commented the stranger known as Tosto. "It goes back probably more than ten thousand years. I shall have to find out sometime. But now that you are here, what are you going to do?"

"I don't know, and I don't care!" said Don savagely. "It's just as well to be dead as epileptic. Elaine, that girl—you see, I——"

The other man shook his head, puzzled. "I can't quite understand that part. You leave your time and age because you wanted to mate with a certain girl and couldn't because of epilepsy — whatever that is. Were women rare, or too strong to subdue in that time? Was she the only one you could approach?"

"She was the only one!" agreed Don, but his meaning did not strike the stranger.

Suddenly, at the snap of an automatic switch over a winking light, a raucous voice rang through the cabin. There was a note of sarcasm or derision in it, and the man called Tosto answered sharply into a small cup-shaped microphone. The voice came again, still more bitingly arrogant. This time Tosto half arose, snarling into the mouthpiece. There was a short interchange of clipped words and then Tosto snapped off the voice-tube with a wild laugh that vibrated in anger.

BEWILDERED, Don watched his companion manipulate his knobs and levers with a threatening sneer on his face. The house on legs immediately increased its pace; Don could feel by the pounding of its steel feet that it was actually running! Every now and then the

cabin would shake as one of the great metal legs crashed against a sturdy tree, uprooting it completely.

The pell-mell pace kept up for a long hour. Don began to get tired of the jerky motion. And to what were they going? What had the raucous, belligerent voice said? And why was Tosto fuming in silent anger?

The answer came sooner than Don might have wanted. First there was a flickering of small pilot lights on the control board. Tosto's fine hands streaked to them eagerly. The iron giant stopped dead. Don peered in the direction his companion did and saw through the front window a gigantic single-wheeled vehicle rolling toward them. It had a cabin similar to theirs, attached to a grooved wheel that slid within the broad outer one.

The newcomer, crushing trees in its steady advance, came to a dead halt a hundred yards away. It seemed to stand there defiantly. Some amazing power held the huge hundred-foot wheel erect. Tosto barked a word venomously into his microphone. A sharp bark came back. Tosto's hands darted toward levers other than those which motivated the legs.

Don was never quite clear as to what happened then, or in what sequence. If that battle he had witnessed the day before had been deafening, this was twice as thunderous. Peal after peal of ear-shattering sound rang through the cabin. Great sheets of fire and lightning seemed to fall from the sky. Thump after thump rocked the craft till Don feared it would topple over. And so the strange battle raged on.

Suddenly their vehicle lurched drunkenly. The floor tilted dangerously. Don pictured himself mangled in a mass of wreckage. The scene outside swung crazily, pivoted, veered around. Muscles tensed for the crash, Don suddenly became aware that the cabin had righted itself. Pounding of metal feet told him the machine was moving forward. Don raised his eyes They were running to attack!

The wheeled vehicle, standing broadside, was belching torrential lightnings and colored beams. Don winced as a flaming bolt shot arrow-like straight for the front window. But three feet from its mark the livid bomb swerved as though it had encountered a blanket of impenetrable rubber. Some sort of magical cushion was protecting the cabin from harm. All the violent forces which were blasting the trees to smoking splinters ricocheted harmlessly away from the cabin itself—all except one.

Don saw it, a ten-foot oval of white incandescence which leaped from the wheeled enemy like a miniature sun. Some intuition made Don duck. An instant later there was a tremendous concussion, followed by the tinkling thud of glass on metal. The entire front window and frame had smashed against the spot where Don's head had been a second before!

Marveling that he was alive, Don raised his head in the utter silence that followed. He expected to see Tosto a bloody heap flattened against the wall, for he had been directly in front of the fire-bomb. But Tosto, sweating and grinning, was just picking himself off the floor.

"That's that," he announced calmly. "Look at Sigag-T-34, who dared to challenge me!"

Don stared out of the gap which the fire-bomb had blown and saw the huge wheeled vehicle, strangely twisted and torn, lying flat in a smoldering heap of fallen trees. Some titanic force had taken out a full quarter of its broad outer rim.

"Good Lord!" spluttered Don. "He's finished!"

As if to belie him, the enemy's voice came over the radio, but it had lost its insulting tone. It sounded chastened. Tosto answered with bragging inflection and snapped the instrument shut with a gesture of exultation.

"Two victories in as many days!" he gloated. "I will soon be able to challenge Virdi, the Invincible!"

Don, gazing at the fallen enemy, saw the cabin detach itself from the struts which held it to the twisted frame within the outer wheel. It rose fifty feet in the air, then scuttled off over the trees. Somehow it seemed to have the air of a dog with its tail between its legs. Don sighed in relief. At least this titanic battle had not ended in a death.

He turned to the still grinning Tosto. "What were you fighting over?" he asked.

Tosto turned in surprise. "Fighting over? Why, nothing in particular! Sigag there challenged me, thinking he was mighty, and we fought it out. What *is* there to fight over anyway?"

"Wh-what?" Don was incredulous. "Fought it out over nothing? Neither land, nor money, nor—a woman?"

"How ridiculous!" returned Tosto. "If there was a woman involved, I would have fought her, not him! What sense to fight him and then her?"

"What I mean," explained Don, "is that if you both loved the same woman and fought to see which could—er, marry her."

"Marry her? You mean mate with her? What could Sigag have to do with any woman I wanted? I would have to fight *her* to mate with her, not Sigag nor any other person on earth!"

"I'll be damned!" cried Don, more amazed at this than at anything before. "You fight women to marry them, and you fight men over nothing at all!"

"Of course," agreed Tosto. "That's life. Without fighting, life wouldn't be worth living. Women—of course it is pleasant to be their lovers, but the battle to win that privilege adds ten times the zest to such an affair."

As if this cleared the whole issue, Tosto turned away. Donning his repair harness, he opened the floor hatchway, dropped through, and floated with apparently supernatural ease from place to place, surveying the damage done to his vehicle.

Don watched him, trembling still in reaction to the furious battling which had just ended. Perfectly calm, as though nothing of note had happened, Tosto patched up his walking house. Welding and cutting and bending the steel with invisible beams of force, it took him but an hour to hide the scars of battle. In another half-hour he had installed a new window, fashioning it from igneous stone.

DON had heard of transmutation, and even with his unscientific perceptions he knew that this was a miraculous transformation of matter undreamed of by the science of his time.

Tosto came into the cabin, tossed his harness aside, spoke: "I'll have to set aside a few days sometime and build me a new car. This one has been patched too many times to be of much protection any more. I've used this war-car in twenty-one battles already, all of them victories."

"If one of you had been killed in this last battle," asked Don, "would the authorities have punished you, or is this sort of dueling allowed?"

"The authorities!"

Tosto laughed heartily for a long minute. Then he faced Don with a wide grin. "There are no authorities!"

At Don's incredulous stare, he went on: "I see that you can hardly believe me. Well, sooner or later I must tell you all about it, so sit down and listen. Life today is in the ideal state—the state of *anarchy!* Each man is his own government—and each woman. It has been this way for ten thousand years.

"You see, man from the childish past, it all came about through the discovery of the secret of mass-energy conversion—atomic power, you would call it. Fifty

thousand years ago mankind fell heir to limitless power — matter converted into pure energy. It ushered in a new era of luxury and plenty. Atomic power extracted enough energy from a spoonful of sand to supply a man for months. And that same wonderful, cheap power gave men everything they needed—through transmutation. Food, clothing, machinery, power—all from transmutation.

"From then on evolution took a different trend. Instead of tending to *increase* population, the advent of atomic power *decreased* it! Why? Because, eliminating the necessity of laboring to live, it allowed tremendous expansion of the mind. The better minds saw no reason for allowing poorer, duller minds to exist, and warred on them. Of course, victory was easy. Shocking to you, no doubt, but the poor mind, a drag on the race, has no excuse for living that you can invent. As the years rolled by, the limits narrowed and the population decreased still more. It reached a stationary point ten thousand years ago, when the last vestige of farcical government was overthrown, and complete anarchy prevailed.

"Each person living today is a complete, independent entity. With atomic power, the essentials of physical life are simply transmuted from earth or water or rock or anything. Our heritage of science long ago conquered every obstacle of nature to human life. We live today as free as the wind, unfettered, unbound. We can do anything we want at any time we like."

"You don't seem so free to me," said Don dryly. "You have to move around in armored cars to safeguard life, and any minute you may be attacked."

"Oh, we always fight over a principle of some sort," Tosto explained. "Generally it is some minor point of disagreement between the two parties. But the real and only issue is fighting superiority. Each human today has his own type of craft, weapons, armor and such. Sigag prefers a monowheel. I use a walking house because I like to batter down trees. Virdi, the Unconquered, uses a swift airship. She has fought and won over two thousand duels."

"She!" gasped Don. "A woman?"

"Yes, and what a mind! Her electron screens are impregnable. There is not one man on earth would not gladly defeat her —and mate with her. I tried it twice myself. She left laughing, both times, after shooting all my car's six legs away."

"What about the—the race?" queried Don. "Your children—mothers?"

"We have a special consideration for women about to become mothers. From three months before birth of a child to six months after, women are understood to be free from molestation. After that, they are in the running again. However, we are more chivalrous than that. It is an understood rule that a woman is not to be challenged till her child is five years old, unless she herself is the aggressor. At the age of five, a child is put into its own vehicle. It follows its mother around but is not challenged itself until it has announced its own independence by leaving its mother. That usually happens at the age of eight or nine."

"What precocious children!" commented Don. At the same time he pitied their lot, cast off from love and kindness at such a tender age. No wonder they grew up to be such inveterate fighters.

"Those duels," asked Don then, "don't they sometimes result in death?"

"Now and then, through misfortune. We are really not bloodthirsty at heart, you know. Sigag, for instance, nearly finished me when my screen spluttered for a split second. Part of his fire-bomb leaked through."

"What do you do in between duels?" asked Don, suddenly weary of so much battle talk.

"A hundred and one things," replied

Tosto vaguely. "Repairs, improvements, experimentation. Now and then I indulge in a debate with somebody over some scientific point or another. Once I had a debate with Chans-Z-18 for three days as to whether 'a' plus 'b' is equal to 'b' plus 'a'."

"Who won that interesting argument?" grinned Don.

"I did. I shot away his tractor motor and tossed his cabin into a lake! He believes now that they are not equal!"

A WEEK went by, a week in which Don learned much about life in the state of anarchy. Tosto had given him a suit of marvelously soft leather, bright with many colors. He had offered food and water at regular intervals. The food consisted of gelatins of various flavors and not unsavory. Don was at first doubtful that it lived up to Tosto's claim as a perfect food with every substance and vitamin necessary for health. But before many days had passed, he realized it was so.

Tosto, moody at times for hours, made up for it with periods of light loquaciousness. And more and more Don began to realize what a vast gulf separated him and this posterity of the times he had known.

Atomic power had been as much a curse as a blessing.

In a world overrun by a more prolific animal and vegetable life than had ever risen before since the carboniferous age, mankind kept up a petty, senseless squabble over ambiguous nothings. The science of this Age of Anarchy was a restricted science, dealing only with improvements of individual armament and locomotion. Many of the greater secrets of the past Scientific Age had been lost, and never looked for—interplanetary travel, concepts of the universe, and astronomical lore. It was a curious blend of mechanical ingenuity and mental narrowness.

Tosto, for instance, knew how to make beryllium steel from stone, but he could not tell Don how far away the planet Mars was!

Don also revealed much to Tosto of the times he had known. Tosto, impatient with English, had taught Don his own language by means of the miraculous hypnotic process—the language spoken universally in the world of Anarchy. With its aid—for it was an expressive tongue—Don was able to give a living picture of the Twentieth Century, a picture that in Tosto's conception was fantastic and aboriginal. He grinned amusedly at the explanation of "home life." He laughed aloud when told of "taxation." It amazed him to hear that human beings had once eaten plants and animals. The world had known synthetic food for tens of thousands of years.

Tosto had been working on a new offensive weapon off and on, that week. The vehicle had been motionless all that time, and Don felt a great ennui stealing over him. He breathed in relief when his companion fingered the controls. The giant walking house came to rumbling life and plunged through the immense forest which Don was told had no end.

Then Tosto turned to one of his many peculiar apparatuses. Small tubes glowed, and with the hum of etheric forces a pencil of light traced searchingly over a luminous chart squared off in fine cross-lines.

"Hmm," said Tosto. "Jestun-T-15, who has made a study of history, is only a hundred miles north of here—just about the spot where I picked you up after my victory over Algy. I must radio Jestun and see if he can tell me from what Age you come."

"What do you want?" bellowed a voice after Tosto had sent a signal beam to the north.

Tosto made his request, giving several items which Don had told him would identify his times. He misquoted one of them, saying Neandertal Man had just built the

Cheops pyramid a few thousand years before Don's time.

"Neandertal Man did not build the Cheops pyramid!" roared back Jestun. "He was extinct long before that. The Romans built it!"

"Is that so?" retorted Tosto equally as loudly. "The Romans never saw the Cheops pyramid because they sank with their continent, Atlantis, under the ocean fifteen thousand years before!"

A growl came from the speaker. "Are you questioning my statements, Tosto?"

"Your statements! You mean your lackabrain rantings!"

"Coming from your infantile tongue, I can excuse the insult!"

At this Tosto's face darkened. Don suddenly found himself laughing silently as his companion went through the same stages of anger he had with Sigag before their battle. That this would end in challenge and battle, Don knew.

THE argument, a long series of insults, took a new turn when Tosto, glancing at Don, spoke with an important tone: "You may be an authority on ancient history, Jestun, but you wouldn't care to argue against the word of a man *who had lived in that time,* would you? I have in my cabin at this moment a primeval being who has come to the Anarchy from pre-atomic times"!

A vague splutter came from the radio, and Tosto grinned exultantly toward Don: "I guess that took him down a way."

Then Jestun's voice came, suave: "Which means nothing, Tosto, because I have here in *my* cabin a similar person from that long-ago past!"

Don leaped to his feet, a look of wild hope and incredulity on his face. "That must be—can only be—Professor White! He must have followed me into the future——"

But Tosto did not hear him, engrossed as he was in shouting: "Jestun, you're a liar! You're just jealous that I have a man from the past in *my* cabin!"

"I'm a liar, am I!" shrieked Jestun's voice. "You must prove that by force of arms. I challenge you——"

"Challenge accepted!" barked Tosto.

With rapid, terse words, the two arranged for a duel. As Tosto turned away from the radio, Don grasped him by the shoulders. "Good Lord, you can't fight each other. My friend, Professor White—he's aboard that other car!"

"Friend?" queried Tosto blankly. "You mean ally? There is no such thing."

"Of course not, in your anarchistic conception," cried Don. "But we—the professor and I—are friends—friends—friends! Can't you understand? We know each other—like each other——"

Tosto was both angry and puzzled. Then he shrugged indifferently. "You don't think we'll cancel the battle and sacrifice honor for a whim of yours!"

Don thought of arguing, but his intuition told him it would be useless. How could he impress such a being—one who had lived a lone-wolf existence since childhood—with his concern and friendship toward another man?

He might just as well describe the color red to a blind man.

Don sank hopelessly to his seat.

AS THE great walking house lumbered northward to meet its enemy, Don had much to think about. Why had Professor White taken the same step he had? It had been his greatest aim back in their times to complete his data on wave mechanics and publish them. The transmission of Don's body into the far future was to have been the final step, giving the scientist the vibration rate of a human brain and therefore of that mysterious thing called "thought." Instead, the scientist had cast all fame aside and had plunged recklessly

into an alien world. Had Professor White gone mad at the last minute? Or had he perhaps induced some other man to be the subject of his experiment?

Don shook his head bewilderedly and stared out at the primeval-looking jungle bathed in silvery moonlight. Tomorrow there would be a battle of the giants. One or the other might be destroyed. If he could only signal the professor—or whoever it was—somehow! But that was out of the question with what little he knew of Tosto's complicated apparatus for outside communication.

The more Don thought it over, the more it became apparent to him that he would have to use physical force to prevent Tosto from fulfilling his battle-plan. The idea of doing this to a man who had befriended him in an alien world, at first repugnant to Don, gradually assumed another aspect. Being in Rome, he would do as the Romans did, and would use anarchistic methods in this world of anarchy.

Thinking it over carefully, Don decided to pull his little coup the next day, when they had sighted Jestun's vehicle. If he did it now, he would risk having Tosto turn the tables, or even tricking him and moving away, instead of toward Jestun.

It was not long afterward that Tosto stopped his war-car, stretched out on his couch, and said by way of good-night: "Tomorrow you shall witness a real battle. Jestun and I have never met before, and have the same number of victories to our credit. But of course tomorrow I'll have one more than he."

"Of course," agreed Don amiably. Then the light snapped out, hiding Tosto's confident grin.

In the cover of darkness, Don shook his fist toward the other, smiling grimly in the thought that tomorrow the victory would be his, Don's, and not Tosto's.

Next day, charging rapidly northward, the walking car neared its enemy. But Tosto's alarm system buzzed too soon, indicating the proximity of a third party. It was a rather small ovoid airship which skimmed aimlessly over the jungle top. For the first time he had known him, Don saw Tosto get excited. It was not anger that overcame him, but some other, more inexplicable emotion.

The signal light flashed. Tosto hesitated, then opened his radio.

"Greetings, Tosto!" came a mocking, feminine voice. "Where are you bound? Are you looking for me perhaps?"

"I'm answering a challenge," said Tosto shortly.

"Ah! Let's hope you fare better with that party than you did with me," trilled the other voice with suppressed merriment.

"Well," said Tosto weakly, "I can't stand here arguing with you. Go pick on Virdi once. She'll take the starch out of you."

He snapped off the switch quickly, but not before one word had come back, an imperious "Wait!"

Tosto vacillated, his finger poised over the switch. The pilot light blinked, showing that the other craft was trying to regain contact. Then, with a petulant gesture, Tosto swung his hands instead to his motivating controls and sent his vehicle rumbling away from the ovoid airship.

"Some day," growled Tosto, "I'm going to challenge her again. It was only luck she won last time."

"Did you challenge her because you wanted to — to mate with her that last time?" asked Don curiously.

"No!" exploded Tosto. "I wouldn't mate with her if I did conquer her!"

But Don read something else from the telltale red that spread over his companion's face. He knew it was customary for man and woman antagonists to televise themselves before or after battle. Don wondered—guessed, in fact—that perhaps Tosto had gazed upon her vision and had

not been averse to thinking of her as his lover.

Tosto was moody for the rest of the trip. But when Jestun's craft finally hove into view—a great thing on stilts whose lower ends were caterpillar treads—the battle lust sprang into his dulled eyes. The two war-cars established radio contact, and there was an exchange of insults over the radio. It was Don's cue.

Coming up behind Tosto, Don leaned over his shoulder and shouted into the microphone: "There isn't going to be any battle! Professor White—or whoever you are from the past—keep Jestun away from his controls. I'll take care of Tosto here!"

Don then swung around, clenched fists upraised, as Tosto darted away from the control board. For a moment they faced each other.

"Take my advice," warned Don grimly, "and give in quietly. Don't force me to prove that I'm stronger than you."

Tosto's face changed from vexation to purple anger. Without a word he lunged at Don, swinging his fists with the unprac-

"Some day," growled Tosto, "I'm going to challenge her again."

tised awkwardness of a woman. Chuckling at his adversary's futile efforts, Don tapped him lightly in the chest. Tosto staggered but came back for more. Don clipped him on the chin, sent him reeling. Tosto recovered, glared his apoplectic rage. Don grinned back amiably.

"Had enough, Tosto? Now you have an idea what *real* fighting is like."

Tosto, too enraged yet to speak at this unexpected turn of affairs, made as if to attack again. Then, with an alacrity amazing to Don, he dodged past him and darted for the far end of the cabin. Don realized his danger too late.

Tosto grabbed up his force-beam harness, swung it around, just as Don leaped for him. As if an invisible wall had sprung up, Don thudded into thin air that had suddenly become hard. He sank to the floor in the grip of unbreakable force-beams. He had lost!

"Fool!" cried Tosto, panting. "I've been wondering when you would show your atavistic nature. You are dangerous now to my——"

The rest was drowned out in a great clap of thunder, and Don saw the entire roof puff away in thick vapor. Had Professor White, or whoever it was from the past in that other vehicle, failed also, letting Jestun hurl his Jovian bolts to them? A sudden rage at the way things had turned out shook Don. Then he noticed that the shock of the explosion had loosened Tosto's hands from the force-beam harness. Don lunged for him. With a wild cry, Tosto attempted to retrieve the only defense he had against the stronger man. But this time Don was the quicker. His fist crashed on Tosto's chin, knocking him cold against one wall.

So far so good. If only his ally now in the other car had succeeded as well! Don crawled to the front window and raised his head, expecting any moment to see a terrific fire-bomb catapult across from the other craft. But it too was silent and lifeless.

SUDDENLY the radio light blinked and Don snapped the switch eagerly. A voice came, breathless and excited, "Don, you all right?"

"Professor White!" almost yelled Don. "It is you after all! Yes, I'm all right; I knocked Tosto out."

"I had a tough time of it here," the professor went on. "Jestun is a sort of a burly chap. He fought back like a wildcat. He shot the fire-bomb that took off your roof before I could drag him away from his controls. Then he tripped me and ran for his force-beam harness. But I caught him and throttled him till his face was blue. He's quiet now."

"How long have you been here in the anarchy?" asked Don then.

"As long as you. Speak the language and everything. Jestun picked me up from the same spot you had been picked up from by Tosto a few hours earlier. Jestun considers me quite a find, as he is interested in ancient history. His knowledge of it is grossly inaccurate. He thinks Chop Suey is the name of a great city of our time!"

"Damn' funny world," grunted Don. "Professor, we've got to get together while we have the chance, and away from these battling maniacs. Maybe, once joined, you and I can get along in the forests—like savages. And steer clear of any more walking laboratories or floating penthouses."

"Can you get out of that walking house?" asked the scientist. "It probably has a descending force-beam just as this vehicle has."

"I think I can. I'll try, anyway, and meet you on the ground."

Don sprang away from the radio and stepped before the bank of six buttons which he knew controlled the floor panels and the descension beam. But which button did which? He pressed the first and

to his satisfaction the bifold slide panels yawned apart. Far below was the leaf-carpeted ground. Which button now operated the descension beam?

Don swore and swung himself through the aperture by his hands. He had seen the branch of a huge tree not five feet below and a little to one side. Better to descend with a little work than to take a chance with a tricky invisible beam of force. His toes were barely able to touch the limb, but it was thick and Don let go with his hands. His released weight bent the branch with an ominous cracking sound, but it held, and Don scrambled hastily toward the thicker trunk. It was a simple matter then to clamber downward. He shinned down the last twenty feet of sheer trunk, rough bark affording him foothold.

He ran the hundred yards to the other vehicle. Crossing the felled tree trunks which the caterpillar treads had thrown over, Don failed to find his friend anywhere about. He shouted and an answering shout came from above: "Stand under this housing, Don. I'm going to pick you up with a lifting force-beam!"

Don stood himself underneath the colossal machine on stilts, wondering if Professor White knew which control to use. Otherwise he might be fried or crushed by nameless forces with which the anarchists had so amply equipped their gigantic structures. But he heard a familiar whirring click and a gentle, invisible hand raised him up and up. Soon he saw the professor's moon-like face peering from the opened hatchway.

Don scrambled into Jestun's cabin with the help of the scientist. Then they shook hands, silently, eagerly.

"What's the idea," asked Don presently, "getting me up here?"

"Because I think we're better off in one of these animated skyscrapers, battles or no battles, than we would be down there in the jungle. Nature has been unhampered by mankind in the past fifty thousand years. The forests are full of ferocious, carnivorous animals. I think I could even run this machine with a little practise."

"What about him?" grunted Don, pointing to Jestun's still figure on the floor.

"We can exile him with his force-beam harness. With that he can build himself a new machine in a few days."

Don threw himself on a couch. "What a crazy world we're marooned in, Professor! A bunch of fighting anarchists who'll battle over a speck of dirt! Why did you come here, anyway? How did Elaine ever consent to your leaving?"

Professor White avoided Don's eyes as he spoke: "I came, Don, because Elaine—because she came here before me! She followed you, Don, realizing at the last moment that she really loved you more than life! She tried to prevent my sending you, there in the laboratory, but it was too late. The vibration dampening had already begun and it would have killed you to stop. Elaine—she insisted on following you that same day, a few hours later!"

"Elaine—*here!*" Don was on his feet, eyes wild, breath short. "Good God! Not here in this insane world! Damn you, White, how could you ever do such a thing?"

The professor cowered back as Don clenched his fists with a wild rage in his face. But Don quieted down.

"It was my fault," said the scientist sorrowfully. "My scientific zeal overwhelmed me. Elaine begged, pleaded, to follow you in whatever strange future you were. I remonstrated. But, in sending you, I had failed in one little step to measure the vibration rate of human thought. It came to me that Elaine would complete my data. I transmitted her — my only daughter!"

Don curled his lips in disgust, but the professor went on doggedly: "I saw my

folly too late. She was gone. Then remorse for my cold-bloodness overcame me, and to atone, I transmitted myself. If you had wandered away from the rematerializing spot, I figured I could then be with her, to protect her in whatever strange civilization or environment she was. I landed on that little hillock where my laboratory had stood in the far past, but she was gone!"

"Oh, God!" groaned Don, sinking to the couch. "Where is she now?"

PROFESSOR WHITE shook his head sadly, then turned, startled, as the figure of Jestun turned over. The man's hands strayed to where the scientist's blunt fingers had squeezed his windpipe. Suddenly he sat up. Don stood himself with his back to the force-beam harness where it hung on a hook. Without this Jestun was helpless to resist them in whatever they wanted.

At this moment the radio light blinked warningly. Don and the professor looked at each other surprised.

"That's Tosto," said Jestun, arising. "Let me talk to him."

Don swore. "I knew I should have been more careful. I should have tied him up." He shoved Jestun aside and spoke into the microphone, after snapping on the switch: "What do you want, Tosto?"

"Oh, it's you!" came back Tosto's voice with a note of hardness. "You attacked me, insulted me, and if you weren't a primeval being without a war-car, I would challenge you. Tell Jestun, if he is conscious, that I stand ready to battle him any time he is ready."

Jestun sprang to the radio before Don could stop him, shouting: "I am right here, pig, and stand ready to bend aside your puny rays!"

"Get ready then!" And Tosto's voice clicked off.

Jestun leaped to his controls. Don leaped with him, to keep him away.

"Fool!" snarled Jestun. "Do you want to die? Only I can handle these weapons and defenses. Let me battle Tosto or we all three die on the spot!"

Professor White pulled Don away. "Too late to stop it. It's our only way out—letting Jestun battle him. I rather imagine Tosto is just enraged enough to blast us all to atoms if we don't fight back."

Almost immediately, as Jestun shot the battle signal into the air, the fight began. In a titanic, senseless waste of energy, the two steel leviathans hurled lightnings and unnamable ray-forces at each other. The trees around splintered and crashed till all the immediate vicinity had been leveled. Behind their electronic screens, the two belligerents worked furiously, each waiting for the other's defenses to weaken, even if for an infinitesimal instant.

Driving their power units to excess, it was only a question of time and opportunity. They were evenly matched. Each had already won over a thousand duels. But Tosto proved the better after ten minutes of nerve-racking thunder. Jestun's screens spluttered. With diabolical aim, Tosto sheared away his roof, even as Jestun had demolished his before. Then he hurled boring beams of incandescence at Jestun's four stilt legs. They vanished in molten streams.

Jestun, with an exclamation of sharp disappointment, snapped on his underside force-beams, and flung skyward the yellow flare of surrender. The avalanche of sound and light ceased. Their cabin bumped against the ground roughly, despite the cushioning force-beams.

The radio signaled imperiously, and Tosto's voice came, crawling with triumph. "So, Jestun, do I deal with temerity. *Au revoir.* You can have the primordial being called Don Jones and welcome. I go now to search out Vio and battle her. I have a new ray nearly completed that will batter down her screens in short order."

The voice clicked off, and through the window those in Jestun's cabin could see Tosto's great walking house lumber off to the southward.

Professor White clutched at Don's arm. "Did you hear that?—Tosto is going to battle Vio! Vio is the woman who picked up Elaine and carried her away before I came an hour later. I know that, because Jestun here, who found me, told me his charts informed him Vio had passed the spot just before!"

"Has Vio an ovoid airship?" asked Don.

"Yes," answered Jestun, looking up. "Tosto has tried to mate with her several times but she always defeated him. But since then Tosto has become a pretty good fighter."

Don remembered the egg-shaped airship they had passed on the way to the present rendezvous. It must have been Vio herself, then! Tosto was even now hurrying to give her battle. And in Vio's cabin was Elaine! Don thought of the girl going through the nerve-racking experience of a battle, with possible death in the end, and shuddered.

Don suddenly advanced on Jestun. He spoke savagely: "Aboard that craft of Vio's is a girl I love. I don't know if you get what I mean, but that girl is more to me than my life. But to you your own petty skin is all-important, because in this anarchic madhouse on earth today, love and friendship for others seem to be entirely unknown. I'm desperate, Jestun, because the girl I love is in danger. How soon can you fix up this crate and follow Tosto?"

Jestun qualified before the livid deadliness in Don's face. He said hurriedly: "It will take three days to re-install my cabin with motivation."

"Wait!" exclaimed Professor White. "You can outfit this cabin, I believe, with gravity-repelling engines and make it an airship of sorts in a much shorter time."

"In a day," agreed Jestun.

"Then do it!" commanded Don. "But first of all see if you can contact Vio by radio. Being a woman, maybe she will listen to reason and avoid the battle with Tosto."

After some minutes of signaling, Jestun succeeded in contacting Vio. Her sweetly feminine voice came to them, and Don spoke in a rush, explaining the situation. He begged her, for the sake of the girl she had in her cabin, to flee from Tosto and come to meet Jestun's craft.

But Don had stirred ten thousand years of tradition, using the word "flee."

"Flee?" came back Vio's voice. "From Tosto?—whom I have six times defeated, and can do so a dozen times again? I should say not! However, I won't go to meet him. If he desires a tussle, let him come to me. As for the girl——"

"Yes, good God! Think of her!" Don's voice was ragged. "Can't you people once think of someone else besides yourselves and your foolish pride?—Elaine! Are you there?—Let me talk to her!"

But for some inexplicable reason, the connection clicked out at the other end. No amount of signaling would induce Vio to reopen communication. Don cursed the eternal feminine and its perverseness, then grabbed Jestun by the shoulders, shook him like a child.

"Get that engine made as quickly as you can. Any stalling on the job and I'll finish the throttling my friend didn't!"

ALL that day and on into the night, Don stared moodily over the jungle land, his heart torn with anxiety for the girl he loved. But Professor White, with the eager soul of a scientist, followed every step as Jestun fitted his cabin with atmospheric engines. By asking innumerable questions, the professor was able to understand much of what went on. Jestun was not so much a great scientist as a great mechanician, armed as he was with semi-

miraculous forces and instruments. Indeed, Professor White came to realize that Jestun's science was greater than his own in degree rather than in quality.

Jestun fashioned his power unit from a heap of dirt. Finished, it was amazingly simple, no bigger than a console radio. Yet Jestun admitted that its atomic power-valves could lift and catapult forward at least a thousand tons of weight. The motivation was to be by a beam which would repulse gravitation, to serve as a lifting medium, and would react against the earth's magnetic lines of force for forward propulsion.

"There," said Jestun, straightening up. Already the first rosy signs of coming dawn were in the east. "Now if you will open the floor panels, I'll fasten it solidly to the underside of the cabin, and it will be done."

Professor White's voice was firm, after detecting a crafty gleam in the other's eye: "Open the panel yourself, and also detach from your force-beam harness the welding-instrument, which is all you need."

"But how will I move the engine-unit?" remonstrated Jestun. "It's heavy."

"Use your muscles and drag it to the hatchway," said the scientist laconically. "You need the exercise. The underside force-beam will serve for lowering it."

Frowning impotently, Jestun detached his welding-unit and handed over the rest of the harness peevishly. He made much work of dragging the engine toward the open trap-door, but the professor grinned pitilessly, knowing it was mostly aluminum and beryllium.

Then Jestun tipped it into the range of the lowering force-beam, and shoved the now weightless apparatus into position. Using his welder, he joined metal to metal as firmly as if they had been cast in one piece.

"Shall we test it?" inquired the professor as Jestun came into the cabin again.

"Test it? What for? Nothing we make in this day and age must be tested, unless it is something radically new and untried."

Professor White conceded the point, hiding the admiration in his eyes at Jestun's great skill in things mechanical.

"Now one thing," he said, "before we leave with our new engine. That mirrored apparatus over there—does it produce vibration of some sort?"

Jestun followed his pointing finger. "Yes, it is a weapon that shoots out a broad beam of vibration. It will disrupt a tree in three seconds, bursting it into——"

"Into pure vibration?" asked the scientist eagerly.

"Yes, but it is a minor weapon. Against an electronic screen of power it is useless. I use it now and then to disintegrate animals of large size when I go out hunting for sport."

"Can you give me the elements of the formula-curve for its radiation?" queried the scientist.

Jestun thought a moment and then rattled off a complicated mathematical equation. Professor White had him repeat it more slowly, and in the mathematical terms used with the English language. In the week they had been together, they had come to understand each other's mode of mathematical definition.

"That's it!" cried the scientist suddenly, capering around in a most undignified manner. He explained his sudden exuberance to Don, who had turned to stare in surprise, with cryptic briefness. "All set, my boy. We're ready to trail Tosto and rescue Elaine."

Don blinked, coming out of a trance of thought, and sprang to his feet. His jaw set firmly, he spoke: "Start her up, Jestun, and give her everything she's got. Maybe we can catch the fighting fool before he attacks Vio."

Jestun obediently worked the controls —already set to motivate the underside

engine by ether control—and with a humming surge, the large round cabin leaped away from the ground. A careful glance at the ruled chart set for the two craft with which they were concerned showed Tosto nearing the dot which was Vio. Tosto had gone slowly, evidently working out the new ray he had boasted would make him the foreordained victor. Jestun, when asked, thought it doubtful that they could overtake him before meeting Vio, unless Vio herself retreated. But Vio moved not at all, neither ahead nor back.

"Now then," said Professor White, as Don took up his silent brooding at the window again. "Jestun, set your robot pilot and listen to me."

Jestun complied. The scientist thereupon engaged him in a technical discussion about the vibration-apparatus. Don, deaf to all else except his own anxious thoughts, did not see the two men bend suddenly to work with the energy-harness. Nor did he notice that Jestun, at the other's prompting, was welding a small, but intricate, unit in the heart of the vibration weapon's mechanism. He might have been surprised had he turned around, to see Professor White beaming exultantly, and to see Jestun looking at the scientist from the past with a grudging wonder, not unmixed with admiration.

The newly converted airship traversed the distance which Tosto had leisurely navigated in a full day, in no more than two hours. But just before they arrived, Don, staring at the chart, exclaimed aloud:

"Look! The two dots are together! They must be fighting already!"

"Not yet," said Jestun, tuning the radio. "Listen."

Tosto's voice came to them, challenging Vio. The latter's feminine tones came back, taunting, reminding the challenger that she had time and again defeated him.

"Ah, but not this time!" rasped Tosto's voice confidently. "I will warn you beforehand that I have a new ray, a combination I have been long seeking of two of my most powerful beams. If your paltry screens stand up one minute against it, you'll be lucky. Get ready, Vio, my dear! I'll be your lord and master in less time than it takes to tell!"

"Wait, Tosto!" came Vio's tones, and somehow her voice was pleading. "I do not wish to fight you at present. I don't fear your silly new ray, but I have in my cabin a creature—a woman—from the past. It is for her sake that I ask you to revoke your challenge. This girl is a gentle thing, unused to battle and noise."

Don silently thanked the unknown woman Vio for having finally used her better judgment. But his face went white as he heard Tosto's sneering answer.

"So you have also a being from the past! There is getting to be an epidemic of them. Well, it makes no difference. I suppose she is what is called a 'friend' of the male atavist who recently attempted to take my life in my own cabin. Accordingly, let her suffer for it. Vio, prepare yourself!"

"Tosto, I beg of you! Revoke your challenge and—and I'll surrender to you without battle!"

Tosto's gasp from the radio coincided with Jestun's. For the first time in their lives, a citizen of the Anarchy had shamefully offered surrender without fight! A woman, fully the military equal of any male, offering to pay the customary tribute in such man-woman battles, without raising a finger in resistance. It was incredible!

Then Tosto's voice issued from the radio: "That is a joke I don't appreciate, Vio. I cannot believe you a coward—in fact, such a creature has not existed on earth for ten thousand years—so I take it as your spiteful humor. I give you one minute to signal battle. Then I start regardless!"

Don clenched his fists involuntarily, cursing. He whirled on Jestun. "Can't

you go any faster? We must get there before he starts. With that new ray, he's likely to murder his opponent."

Jestun did manage to eke out a little more speed, but it took them five minutes to arrive. They swooped down on a wide, open space wherein trees had been leveled to smoking ruins, to find Tosto's walking machine standing over Vio's fallen airship.

THE victor's voice blared out of the radio: "Ha, you are here too, Jestun? Looking for another tussle? Better run away while the running's good—look what my new ray did to Vio, the confident!"

Don shouted over the radio: "If the girl Elaine in that airship is harmed, I'll—I'll——"

"You'll what?" taunted Tosto. "You are rather quick with your fists, apeman, but I stand invincible——"

"In your ship, yes," cried Don. "But I challenge you to fight me man to man on the ground, instead of hiding behind energy-screens and metal walls."

A harsh, mocking laugh came from Tosto.

Don, grinding his teeth, faced his two companions. "What are we going to do—let that woman-beater, Tosto, get away without punishment? If he'd only face me——"

Professor White pulled Don's ear down and whispered into it. A surprised look came into the younger man's face. Then he sprang before the radio: "All right, Tosto. Since you're afraid to risk your precious hide on the ground with me, we'll battle you, ship to ship."

"Fine!" returned Tosto. "I don't mind adding another victory to my string. You've got three minds there in your cabin, Jestun, but I don't fear defeat. What are two atavists and one nincompoop to me?"

Jestun, who had been a sort of apathetic spectator, fumed in sudden anger. His slender fingers reached for the controls.

By mutual agreement, the two warriors moved the scene of action some hundreds of yards away, so that Vio's helpless ship might not be accidentally harmed. Then the Olympic thunders and Jovian bolts began to rain in a veritable torrent from walking house to floating ship and back. For a half-minute this noisy business went on—a carnage of hundreds of helpless trees—while Professor White drew a careful bead for the dead center of Tosto's cabin with the mirror-weapon's televised range-finder. He winked over to Don, his hand on the lever that would end the battle in one split second.

At this crucial moment the airship gave a violent lurch, falling ten feet before Jestun could apply his braking force-beams on the underside.

"Hurry!" screamed Jestun. "That new ray—Tosto has all but battered my screens down! Hur——"

A terrific blast tumbled them around in the cabin like sacks of meal. Don felt the floor fall away from his body. Tosto had won after all, despite the marvelous weapon of which the professor had told him! Don felt a bitterness that salted his tongue.

But some inexplicable miracle caused the tumbling cabin to right itself—a half-ruined force-beam gave a dying surge, suspending the cabin off the ground. Don flung himself at the mirror apparatus, beaded Tosto's cabin as he had seen the scientist do, and pulled the lever.

He heard a venomous hiss as if a gargantuan snake had launched itself, and for one brief instant he saw Tosto's cabin dissolve in bands of shadow, as if mists swirled about it. Then Don's world turned crazily around; blackness came over his eyes as a terrific jar threw him against the hard metal wall.

Don opened his eyes on a scene that was more what he had once known than a scene in the world of Anarchy. He saw a group of humans around him as he

lay supine on a couch in Jestun's cabin. But one face—dearly beloved—fastened his wandering, puzzled eyes.

"Elaine!"

Soft arms went about his neck, and warm, sweet lips pressed lovingly to his. He passed his own arms around Elaine and hugged her, bear-like. Suddenly he noticed that his arms were weak.

"What's wrong with me?" gasped Don. He found even his voice weak. "I feel like a wet rag! What —I know!"—his voice cracked—"it's that damned epilepsy—it's got me again. Oh, God, let me die!"

Professor White now stood over him, spoke soothingly, "No, Don, I'm glad to say it was not your epilepsy. In fact, epilepsy will never bother you again. I have checked with Tosto and find you haven't had an attack for the nine days you've been here in this world. The cure was accomplished by the process which slowed down your vibration rate. Life, health and disease are, in the last analysis, part of the scheme of vibration. Something in my machine straightened out, or eliminated, the bad vibration which caused your epilepsy. You are free of it for ever."

"But why am I so weak?" asked Don. "Just as I always used to feel after——" His eyes dimmed. "Are you trying to fool me like a little child—salving my feelings?"

"Don!" Professor White's voice was firm. "The reason you are so weak is because the mirror-weapon back-fired at the moment of firing and bathed you in a wash of its powerful force. You have been unconscious for a whole week!"

"A week!" spluttered Don.

"Yes, dear, but now the worst is over and you will get well. And then——" Elaine paused demurely.

Don showed that he understood by pulling her to him and kissing her. Then his eyes encountered a strange sight. He saw Tosto, and a young woman who must be Vio, standing side by side not far away, watching the scene with smiling eyes. They were holding hands!

Don gasped, and his eyes went wider on seeing at the other side of the cabin Jestun whispering to another person he had never seen before—a young and vibrant woman.

Professor White spoke again: "Explanations are in order, Don. Something great has come to pass. Tosto and Vio are going to get married. So are Jestun and Virdi!"

"Virdi!" cried Don incredulously. "Why, she's the greatest undefeated fighter of Anarchy!"

"Was!" corrected the scientist. "Jestun, equipped with my new weapon, met up with Virdi and defeated her. The new weapon, an adaption of my vibration reducer, sends vital parts of engines and weapons into the future, making them useless. Jestun was out to test the weapon after we had corrected the aberration which gave you such a jolt, and as luck would have it, he met Virdi the Invincible. He handed her her first and only defeat."

Don nodded. "But that doesn't explain —everything!"

Professor White grinned and Elaine smiled sweetly. Tosto and Jestun, and their two lady companions, blushed like schoolchildren.

"This will be hardest of all to believe," continued Professor White. "But Vio became a convert to gregarious life in the week she had Elaine in her cabin. It dawned on her how infinitely more free and happy a life of our sort would be than their so-called complete anarchy. Their customs and traditions, in a way, are more hidebound than ours ever were. Thus it was that she tried to avoid the fight with Tosto. She was more than willing to be his mate, but only in the new—or rather, old—sense, as a life companion."

"And the same applies to Tosto?" suggested Don.

"Yes." Professor White grinned. "You didn't realize that you had converted him, did you! Jestun and Virdi—their case was almost identical. Jestun, in fact, had tried no less than seven times to defeat her and win her love, even if only for a day."

"And all that time," supplemented Don, "Virdi hoped and prayed that Jestun *would* win!"

It was a telling shot, as Don could tell by the furious blush that suffused the face of the lady in question.

"Quite right," grinned Professor White, "except that tradition was just a little stronger in her, making her fight her best. It was unfortunate for her, really, that she was born with such an ingenious mechanical mind, making her invincible and robbing her of love."

"All well's that ends well," sighed Don, smiling at Elaine.

"But one more thing you should hear," the scientist said then. "Before the triple marriage, over which I shall officiate, we have all agreed that we shall convert to our cause at least a hundred new recruits, with whom we'll then found a new co-operative union here in this mad world of Anarchy!"

He pointed out of the window. Don, by raising his head with the help of Elaine, could see a wide cleared space in which reposed several shining new craft, ovoid-shaped for air travel.

"We built these ships in the week you have been ill. They are armed with the unbeatable vibration-gun. With these ships we are going to sally out, challenge all comers, and defeat them. We must defeat them in ship-to-ship battle first, because of their great pride. But the girls assure me that, once defeated, they will all be willing to join our side and forget Anarchy. You see, Don, this poor fighting world has just been waiting for someone to lead the way and end the nightmare of senseless dueling. All of the women, and most of the men, will jump at the chance to forget their differences and live with one another peacefully. Ask Tosto."

Tosto came forward with a sheepish grin. Don eyed him wonderingly. Could the man have changed overnight from a conceited bully to a tender lover? Well, why not?—love could do some funny things. It had sent him away from the girl he loved.

Don stuck out a hand. Tosto grasped it, intuitively realizing it meant an offer of friendship.

"I only showed you my worst nature," said Tosto, "while we were together in my cabin. I was really beginning to get sick of things as they were, after hearing about the things you told me. I attacked Vio in sheer desperation, hoping to be killed—to end it. I see the light now."

Don saw a light too, a light in Elaine's eyes. It was a lovelight—a promise; and Don thanked all the gods in the universe that he had passed out of the darkness.

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Far Below

By ROBERT BARBOUR JOHNSON

A weird tale of the New York subway, and horrible things with dead-white eyes that burrow up beneath the unsuspecting city

WITH a roar and a howl the thing was upon us, out of total darkness. Involuntarily I drew back as its headlights passed and every object in the little room rattled from the reverberations. Then the power-car was by, and there was only the "klackety-klack, klackety-klack" of wheels and lighted windows flickering past like bits of film on a badly-connected projection machine. I caught glimpses of occupants briefly; bleak-eyed men sitting miserably on hard benches; a pair of lovers oblivious to the hour's lateness and all else; an old bearded Jew in a black cap, sound asleep; two Harlem Negroes grinning; conductors here and there,

too, their uniforms black splotches against the blaze of car-lights. Then red tail-lamps shot by and the roar died to an earthquake rumble far down the track.

"The Three-One Express," my friend said quietly, "from the Battery. On time to the minute, too. It's the last, you know —until nearly dawn."

He spoke briefly into a telephone, saying words I could not catch, for the racket of the train was still in my ears. I occupied the interval by staring about me. There was so much to be seen in the little room, such a strange diversity of apparatus—switches and coils and curious mechanisms, charts and graphs and piles of documents; and, dominating all, that great black board on which a luminous worm seemed to crawl, inching along past the dotted lines labeled "49th Street," "52nd Street," "58th Street," "60th . . ."

"A new wrinkle, that!" my friend said. He had put down his phone and was watching the board with me. "Lord! I don't dare think what it cost to install! It's not just a chart, you know. It actually records! Invisible lights — the sort of things that open speakeasy doors and rich men's garages. Pairs of them spaced approximately every twenty-five yards along five miles of subway tunnel! Figure that out on paper, and the total you'll get will seem hardly believable. And yet the city passed the appropriation for them without a murmur. It was one of the last things Mayor Walker put up before his resignation. 'Gentlemen,' he said to the Finance Board, 'it doesn't matter what you think about *me!* But this measure *must* go through!' And it did. There wasn't a murmur of protest, though the city was almost broke at the time. . . . What's the matter, man? You're looking queer."

"I'm *feeling* queer!" I said. "Do you mean to say the thing goes that far back? To Walker's time?"

He laughed. It was a strange laugh, that died eerily amid the dying echoes of the train far down the tunnel.

"Good Lord!" he gasped. "To his time —man, Walker hadn't served his first term as mayor when this thing started! It goes back to World War days—and even before that. The wreck of the train, I recall, passed as a German spy plot to keep us from going in with the Allies. The newspapers howled bloody murder about alleged 'confessions' and evidence they claimed they had. We let 'em howl, of course. Why not? America was as good as in the war anyhow, by then. And if we'd told the people of New York City what really wrecked that subway train—well, the horrors of Château-Thierry and Verdun and all the rest of them put together wouldn't have equaled the shambles that rioting mobs would have made of this place! People just couldn't stand the thought of it, you know. They'd go mad if they knew what was down here—far below."

The silence was worse than the roar had been, I thought—the strange, echoing, somehow pregnant silence of empty vastness. Only the "drip, drip" of water from some subterranean leak broke it—that and the faint crackling noise the indicator made as its phosphorescent crawling hinted at "68th Street," "72nd," "78th . . ."

"Yes," my friend said slowly. "They'd go mad if they knew. And sometimes I wonder why we don't go mad down here —we who *do* know, and have to face the horror down here night after night and year after year—I think it's only because we don't really face it that we get by, you know, because we never quite define the thing in our own minds, objectively. We just sort of let things hang in the air, you might say. We don't speak of what we're guarding against, by name. We just call it 'Them,' or 'one of Them,' you know—take Them for granted just as we took the enemy overseas, as something that's just

down here and has to be fought. I think if we ever really did let our minds get to brooding on what they are, it'd be all over for us! Human flesh and blood couldn't stand it, you know—couldn't stand it!"

HE BROODED, staring out into the tunnel's darkness. The indicator crackled faintly on the wall. "92nd Street," "98th," "101st . . ."

"Beyond 120th Street things are pretty safe," I heard my friend's voice as I watched. "When the train reaches that point you'll see a green light flash 'all clear,' though that doesn't mean absolute safety, you understand. It's just what we've established as the farthest reach of Their activities. They may extend them at any time, although so far They haven't done so. There seems to be something circumscribed about their minds, you know. They're creatures of habit. That must be what it is that's kept Them in this one little stretch of tunnel, with all the vast interlocking network of New York's subway system to rove in if they chose. I can't think of any other explanation, unless you want to get into the supernatural and say it's because they're 'bound' to this particular locality, by some sort of mystic laws; perhaps because it's lower than the other tunnels—chiseled far down into the basic bedrock of Manhattan, and so near to the East River you can almost hear the water lapping on quiet nights. Or maybe it's just the awful dankness of the tunnel here, the fungoid moisture and miasmic darkness that suits Them. At all events they don't come up anywhere else except along this stretch. And we've got the lights, and the patrol cars, and three way-stations like this one, with ten men on constant duty from dark till dawn—oh yes, my boy! It's quite a little army I command down here in the night watches—an army of the Unburied Dead, you might say; or an army of the Eternally Damned.

"I've actually had one of my men go mad, you know! Two others had to be placed in sanitariums for a while, but they got over it and are serving here still. But this fellow—well, we had to machine-gun him down like a dog finally, or he'd have got one of us! That was before we got the 'dark lights' placed, you see, and he was able to hide out in the tunnel for days without our being able to find him. We'd hear him howl sometimes as we patrolled, and see his eyes shining just as Their eyes do in the darkness; so we knew that he was quite 'gone.' So when we finally ran him down we killed him—just like that. No bones made about it. 'Put-put-put!' and that was the end. We buried him down in the tunnel, too, and now the trains run over him as he lies. Oh, there was nothing irregular about the business! We filled out full Departmental reports, and got the consent of his relatives, and so on; only we just couldn't take the poor fellow above-ground and run risks of people seeing him before interment. You see, there were certain . . . alterations. I don't want to dwell on it, but his face—well, the change was just beginning, of course, but it was quite unmistakable; quite dehumanizing, you know. There would have been some excitement up there, I'm afraid, just at sight of that face! And there were other details—things I only found out when I dissected his body. But I think I'd rather not go into them either, old boy, if you don't mind. . . .

"The whole point is, we have to be rather careful down here, all of us in the 'Special Detail.' That's why we have such unusual working conditions. We wear police uniforms, of course, but we aren't subject to ordinary police discipline. Lord! What would an above-ground 'cop' make of having every other night off and every day all to himself, and with a salary that—well, a corporal down here gets as much as does an Inspector up there!

"But, at that, I think we earn our pay. . . .

"I know *I* do. Of course I can't tell you what my salary is—they made me promise never to disclose it when they hired me from the Natural History Museum back in —well, I don't like to think about how long ago that was! I was Professor Gordon Craig in those days, you know, instead of Inspector Craig of N. Y. P. D. And I'd just returned from Carl Akeley's first African expedition after gorillas. That was why they brought the Thing to me for examination, you see, after that first big wreck in the subway that'd only been opened less than a year. They'd found it pinned down in the wreckage, screaming in agony from their lights on its dead-white eyeballs. Indeed, it seemed to have died from the lights as much as from anything else. Organically it was sound enough, save for a broken bone or two.

"WELL, they brought it to me, because I was supposed to be the museum's leading authority on apes. And I examined it—believe me, I examined it, old boy! I went for six days and nights without sleep or even rest, analyzing that dead corpse down to its last rag and bone and hank of hair!

"No scientist on this earth ever had a chance like that before, and I was making the best of it. I found out all there was to be found before I collapsed over my laboratory table and had to be taken to the hospital.

"Of course long before that I had told them the thing wasn't an ape. There was vaguely anthropoid structure, all right; and the blood corpuscles were almost human—quite shockingly so. But the head and the spade-like appendages and the muscular development were quite unlike any beast or man on this earth. Indeed, the thing had never been on this earth! There was no doubt of that! It would have died above ground in half a minute, just like an angleworm in the sun.

"And I'm afraid my report to the authorities didn't help them much. After all, even a fellow scientist would have found it a bit difficult to reconcile my classification of 'some sort of giant, carrion-feeding, subterranean mole' with my ravings about 'canine and simian developments of members' and my absurd insistence on 'startlingly humanoid cranial development, and brain convolutions indicating a degree of intelligence that——'

"Well, there's no use going into all that now! I firmly expected them to order me up before a Sanity Commission when I reported my findings. Instead, they offered me a position as head of the 'Special Subway Detail,' at a salary that was, to say the least, fantastic. It was more a month than I'd been getting a year from the museum.

"Because, you see, they'd deduced much of the stuff for themselves without needing me to tell them! They had facts they'd deliberately withheld from me, not wanting to influence my report. They knew that that train had been deliberately derailed—the mutilated track proved that beyond all doubt. No less than three ties had been taken up and laid some distance away down the tunnel. And the condition of the earth about the wrecked cars showed conclusively that extensive mining and sapping had taken place there—it was like a gigantic mole-hill, only worse. And while I'd been analyzing stomach fluids and body tissue to try to find out what my subject fed upon, they'd been burying, secretly and with most elaborate precautions, the half-dessicated corpses of half a dozen men and women and children who — well, they hadn't died in the wreck, old boy! They hadn't died in the wreck, any more than had that screaming thing that hid its eyes from the lights when they found it pinned in the wreckage where it had been caught

while trying to drag a dead victim out—God! What a hideous shambles that place must have been before the wrecking-crews got there.

"Mercifully, of course, there was total darkness. The poor devils who were merely injured never knew what charnel horrors were going on in the Stygian depths about them—nor cared, no doubt, in their agony! A few of them gibbered afterward about green eyes, and claws that raked their faces—but of course all that was set down to delirium! Even one man who had his arm chewed half off never knew—surgeons amputated the rest immediately and told him when he regained consciousness that he'd lost it in the wreck. He's still walking the streets today, blissfully ignorant of what almost happened to him that night.

"Oh, you'd be surprised, old boy, how you can hush a thing up if you've got a whole city administration behind you! And believe me, we *did* hush matters up. No newspaper reporter was ever allowed to see the wreck—freedom of the press or no freedom of the press! The Government wanted to appoint a commission to investigate—we squelched it! And by the time the crews had cleaned out the smashed train and removed the last victim, the Special Subway Detail had gone into action. And it's been on steady duty ever since—for the last twenty-odd years!

"WE HAD a terrible time at first, of course. All these modern improvements weren't available then. All we had were lanterns and guns and hand-cars—with which to patrol nearly five miles of tunnel. It was Mrs. Partington sweeping back the sea all over again—only worse. A handful of puny mortals against Hell itself, in the eternal darkness of these long gloomy tunnels far below the city.

"There were no more wrecks after we took over, though; I'll say that much. Oh, an accident or two. How could we prevent them? We did everything we could think of! How we worked in those early years! Once we sank a shaft fifty feet deep in the earth, where we'd seen queer disturbances beside the train-tracks and heard queerer sounds. And once we blocked up both ends of the tunnel for a mile stretch and filled it with poison gas. And once we dynamited—but why go on? It was all useless, utterly useless. We just couldn't get to grips with anything tangible. Oh, we'd hear sounds sometimes on our long dismal patrols in the darkness; our little lanterns mere pin-pricks of light in these vast old concrete vaults. We'd catch glimpses of glinting eyes far off, find fresh earth piled up where only a moment before there'd been hard-packed cinders and gravel. Once in a while we'd fire our guns at something whitish and half seen, but there'd be only a tittering laugh in answer—a laugh as mirthless and savage as that of a hyena, dying away in the earth. . . .

"A thousand times I was tempted to chuck the whole thing, to get back above ground to sunshine and sanity and forget the charnel horrors of this mad Nyarlathotep-world far underneath. And then I'd get to thinking of all those helpless men and women and children riding the trains unsuspecting through the haunted dark, with Evil out of the primeval dawn burrowing beneath them for their destruction, and—well, I just couldn't go, that's all. I stayed and did my duty, as the rest did, year after year after year. It's been a strange career for a man of science, and certainly one I never dreamed I'd be following during all the years I prepared myself for museum work. And yet I flatter myself that it's been rather a socially useful career at that; perhaps more so than stuffing animals for dusty museum cases, or writing monstrous textbooks that no one ever bothers to read. For I've a science of my own down here, you know: the science of keeping millions of dollars worth of sub-

way tunnels swept clean of horror, and of safeguarding the lives of half the population of the world's largest city.

"And then, too, I've opportunities for research here which most of my colleagues above ground would give their right arms for, the opportunity to study an absolutely unknown form of life; a grotesquerie so monstrous that even after all these years of contact with it I sometimes doubt my own senses even now, although the horror is authentic enough, if you come right down to it. It's been attested in every country in the world, and by every people. Why, even the Bible has references to the 'ghouls that burrow in the earth', and even today in modern Persia they hunt down with dogs and guns, like beasts, strange tomb-dwelling creatures neither quite human nor quite beast; and in Syria and Palestine and parts of Russia. . . .

"But as for this particular place—well, you'd be surprised how many records we've found, how many actual evidences of the Things we've uncovered from Manhattan Island's earliest history, even before the white men settled here. Ask the curator of the Aborigines Museum out on Riverside Drive about the burial customs of Island Indians a thousand years ago—customs perfectly inexplicable unless you take into consideration what they were guarding against. And ask him to show you that skull, half human and half canine, that came out of an Indian mound as far away as Albany, and those ceremonial robes of aboriginal shamans plainly traced with drawings of whitish spidery Things burrowing through conventionalized tunnels; and doing other things, too, that show the Indian artists must have known Them and Their habits. Oh yes, it's all down there in black and white, once we had the sense to read it!

"AND even after white men came—what about the early writings of the old Dutch settlers, what about Jan Van der Rhees and Woulter Van Twiller? Even some of Washington Irving's writings have a nasty twist to them, if you once realize it! And there are some mighty queer passages in 'The History of the City of New York'—mention of guard patrols kept for no rational purpose in early streets at night, *particularly in the region of cemeteries;* of forays and excursions in the lightless dark, and flintlocks popping, and graves hastily dug and filled in before dawn woke the city to life. . . .

"And then the modern writers—Lord! There's a whole library of them on the subject. One of them, a great student of the subject, had almost as much data on Them from his reading as I'd gleaned from my years of study down here. Oh, yes; I learned a lot from Lovecraft—and he got a lot from me, too! That's where the—well, what you might call the *authenticity* came from in some of his yarns that attracted the most attention! Oh, of course he had to soft-pedal the strongest parts of it—just as you're going to have to do if you ever mention this in your own writings! But even with the worst played down, there's still enough horror and nightmare in it to blast a man's soul, if he lets himself think on what goes on *down there,* below the blessed sanity of the earth's mercifully concealing crust. Far below. . . .

"We've figured out—we who've been studying Them all this time, that They must have been pretty numerous once. No wonder the Indians sold this place so cheaply! You'd sell your home cheaply, too, if it were fairly overrun with monstrous noxious vermin that—but with civilization's coming they were decimated, killed off, pogromed against, blasted with fire and steel by men whose utter ruthlessness sprang from soul-shuddering detestation, who slew and kept silent about their slaying, lest their fellowmen think them mad—until finally the blasted remnant of the Things went far underground, bur-

rowed down like worms to charnel depths that — well, we daren't conjecture just where, but we think that there's some fault in the basic bedrock of the Island, some monstrous cavern whose edge this lowest of all the subway tunnels taps, and which lets them through somehow into the tubes. . . .

"Oh, it took us a long time to find all that out. At first we thought we had to patrol the whole subway system of the city! We had guards even out under the river, and over in Brooklyn and Queens. We were even afraid they'd get into upper levels of the tunnels, perhaps into the very deserted streets of Manhattan during the pre-dawn hours. We had half the police department down here in those days, even the mounted force. Yes, indeed; though God knows what even a trained police horse would do if it ever came face to face with one of those things! But horses were faster than the hand-cars we used then, and could cover more territory.

"But as time went on we got things pretty well localized. It's only in this one stretch of tunnel that the danger is, and only here in certain hours of the night. Don't ask me why they never come up in daylight; for it's always night down here, you know, hundreds of feet below the surface. Maybe it's the constant passage of the trains—they shuttle by at two-minute intervals all day long, you know, and until the Broadway theatres close at night. Only for about four hours of the night is there a lull when long miles of tunnel are lifeless and deserted and silent, when anything could come and go at will in them and not be seen.

"And so it's only during these hours that we really worry, you see. It's only now that we're vigilant and ready. Although of course it's no longer warfare, you understand. We hunt them now, they don't hunt us any more! We run them down howling with terror, kill them or capture them as we will—oh yes, I said capture! A half-dozen times we've had a sort of mad 'Bronx Zoo' of our own down here—or perhaps it would be more accurate to say a living 'Madame Tussaud's Chamber of Horrors.' I have cages in my laboratory, and there have been times when it seemed judicious for influential people above ground to—well, to realize just how important is the work we're doing down here! So when we have a really stubborn skeptic to our program we'd take him in there, hand him a flashlight and let him train it himself on what was prisoned there in total darkness—and then we'd stand by to catch him as he fainted! Oh, a lot of city officials and politicians have been down here. Why not? They couldn't possibly speak of the experience afterward—they'd just be locked up as lunatics if they did! And it made them much more liberal about funds. Our menagerie was a great success, only we just couldn't keep it going for very long at a time! We'd get so soul-sick at the very proximity of the creatures that we'd have to kill them finally. There was just no putting up with them for any length of time!

"OH, IT'S not so much the appearance of the Things, or even what they eat—we got an unlimited supply of *that* from the city morgue; and to anyone who's spent half his life in dissecting-rooms, as I have, it might be a lot worse. But there's a sort of cosmic horror the Things exude that—well, it's quite beyond description. You just can't breathe the same air with them, live together in the same sane world! And in the end we'd have to gun them and throw them back underground to their friends and neighbors—who were waiting for them, apparently. At least we've opened the shallow graves a few days later and there'd be only a gnawed bone or two there. . . .

"And then, of course, we kept them

alive in order to study their habits. I've filled two volumes with notes for my successors who'll carry on the fight when I'm gone—oh, yes, old boy! It'll always have to be carried on, I fear! There's no possibility of ever really wiping them out, you know. All we can do is hold our own. The fight will go on so long as this particular tunnel is occupied. And can't you just see the City Fathers consenting to abandon twenty million dollars' worth of subway tunnels for nothing? 'I'm sorry, gentlemen; but, you see, the place is infested with——' God! What a laughing-stock anyone would be who even suggested that—above ground! Why, even on our own furloughs, when we walk sunlit streets among our fellow men, with God's own blue sky above and God's own clean air about us—even *we* wonder whether all this foulness isn't just a bad dream! It's hard, up there, to realize what can go on down in the crepuscular earth, the mad gnawing eternal darkness far below—Hello!"

The telephone was ringing.

Somehow I didn't listen as he spoke briefly into it, perhaps because I was listening to something else—to a faint crackling from that great blackboard on the wall, where one little light (no glowing worm this time, but only one minute spark) kept flicking oddly on and off and on again. "79th Street" it marked, over and over. "79th Street—79th——"

My friend hung up the phone at length, and stood up. "Queer," he said softly. "Very queer indeed! The first in months; and tonight, now, while we were talking. It makes one wonder, you know—about those supernatural telepathic powers that they're said to have. . . ."

SOMETHING went past in the tunnel outside, something that moved so fast that I could scarcely make it out; just a little low platform on four wheels, with no visible engine to propel it. Yet it scudded along with the speed of a racing car. Uniformed men rode the bucking thing, crouching with glinting objects in their hands.

"Riot Car Number 1!" my friend said, grimly. "Our own version of the 'squad automobiles' above ground. Just one of the little electric hand-cars used in subway construction—but 'souped up' by our engineers until it'll do nearly eighty miles an hour. It could traverse the entire sector in less than five minutes, if it had to. But it doesn't, of course. Another one, also with machine-gunners aboard, left 105th Street at the same time. They'll meet somewhere along the tunnel's length—with the—er, disturbance in between. Let's listen to them!"

He crossed the room to the strange apparatus, threw switches and adjusted dials. There was a burring and crackling from what looked like an old-fashioned radio amplifier that stood on one of the cabinets.

"Microphones every hundred feet along the tunnel!" said my friend. "Another small fortune to install, of course; but another great step forward in our efficiency. A man listens all night long at a switchboard—and you'd be surprised to know what he hears sometimes! We have to change operators pretty often. Ah! there we are. Microphone Number 290—approximately a thousand feet below one of the busiest corners, even at this hour of the night, in all a great metropolis. And—listen! Hear that?"

"That" was a sound that brought me out of my chair, a strange high tittering, blasphemously off key, that merged into a growl and a moan. . . .

"There we are!" my friend grated. "One of them, certainly—perhaps more than one. Hear that scratching, and the rustle of the gravel? All unsuspecting, of course, that they're broadcasting their presence; unaware that we modern human beings have got ourselves a few 'supernatural' powers

of our own, nowadays; and unaware that, from both directions, death is sweeping down upon them on truckling wheels. But a little moment more and—ah! hear that shriek? That howling? That means they've sighted one of the cars! They're fleeing madly along the tunnel now—the voices get fainter. And now—yes! Now they double back. The other car! They're trapped, caught between them. No time to dig, to burrow down into their saving Mother Earth like the vermin they are. No, no, you devils! We've got you! Got you! Hear 'em yell, hear 'em shriek in agony! That's the lights, you know. Blazing searchlights trained on dark-accustomed bodies; burning, searing, withering them like actual blazing heat! And now 'Brrr-rat-tat-tat!' That's our machine-guns going into action—silenced guns, with Maxims on them so that the echoes won't carry to upper levels and make men ask questions—but throwing slugs of lead, for all that, into cringing white bodies and flattened white skulls. . . . Shriek! Shriek, you beasts from Hell! Shriek, you monsters from the charnel depths! Shriek on, and see what good it does you. You're dead! *Dead!* DEAD— Well, you blasted fool, what are you staring at?"

To save my life I couldn't have answered him. I couldn't look away from his blazing eyes, from his body crouched as if he would spring at me across the room, from his teeth bared in a bestial snarl. . . .

FOR a long moment that tableau held. Then suddenly he dropped into a chair, flung his hands up over his face. I stood regarding him, my mind sickly ticking off details. God! Why had I not seen them before. That lengthening of jaw, that flattening of forehead and cranium—no human head could be shaped like that!

At last he spoke, not looking up. "I know!" he said softly. "I've felt the change coming on me for a long time now. It's coming over all of us, bit by bit, but on me the worst, for I've been here the longest. That's why I almost never go above ground any more, even on leave. The lights are dim down here. But I wouldn't dare let even you see my face in sunlight!

"Twenty-five years, you see—twenty-five long dragging years down here in Hell itself. It was bound to leave a mark, of course. I was prepared for that. But, oh, Great Powers above! If I'd for one instant dreamed what it was to be! Worse, oh, how much worse than any mark of the beast! . . .

"And it's spiritual, you know, as well as physical. I get . . . cravings, sometimes, down here in the night's loneliness; thought and charnel desires that would blast your very soul if I were to whisper them to you. And they'll get worse, I know, and worse until at last I run mad in the tunnel like that poor devil I told you about and my men shoot me down like a dog as they already have orders to do if——

"And yet the thing interests me, I'll admit; it interests me scientifically, even though it horrifies my very soul, even though it damns me for ever. For it shows how They may have come about—*must* have come about, in fact, in the world's dim dawn; perhaps never quite human, of course, perhaps never Neandertal or even Piltdown; something even lower, closer linked to the primeval beast, but that when driven underground, into caves and then beneath them by Man's coming, retrograded century by uncounted century down to the worm-haunted darkness—just as we poor devils are retrograding down here from very contact with them—until at last none of us will ever be able again to walk above in the blessed sunlit air among our fellow men——"

With a roar and a howl the thing was upon us, out of total darkness. Instinc-

tively I drew back as its headlights passed; every object in the little room rattled from the reverberation. Then the power-car was by, and there was only the "klackety-klack, klackety-klack" of wheels and lighted windows flicking by like bits of film on a badly-connected projection machine.

"The Four-Fifteen Express," he said heavily, "from the Bronx. Safe and sound, you'll notice, its occupants all unsuspecting of how they were safeguarded; of how they'll always be safeguarded . . . but at what a cost! At what an awful cost!

"The Four-Fifteen Express. That means it's dawn, you know, in the city overhead. Rays of the rising sun are gilding the white skyscrapers of Manhattan; a whole great city begins to wake to morning life.

"But there's no dawn for us down here, of course. There'll never be a dawn for poor lost souls down here in the eternal dark, far, far below. . . ."

They Run Again

By LEAH BODINE DRAKE

Beyond the black and naked wood
  In frosty gold has set the sun,
And dusk glides forth in cobweb hood. . . .
  Sister, tonight the werewolves run!

With white teeth gleaming and eyes aflame
  The werewolves gather upon the howe!
Country churl and village dame,
  They have forgotten the wheel and plow.

They have forgotten the speech of men;
  Their throats are dry with a dreadful thirst;
And woe to the traveler in the glen
  Who meets tonight with that band accurst!

Now from the hollows creeps the dark;
  The moon like a yellow owl takes flight;
Good people on their house-doors mark
  A cross, and hug their hearths in fright.

Sister, listen! . . . The King-Wolf howls!
  The pack is running! . . . Drink down the brew,
Don the unearthly, shaggy cowls,—
  We must be running, too!

"In God's name!" I gasped; "what does it mean?"

Lens-Shy

By W. M. CLAYTON

An odd and curious tale about a photographer who was assigned to photograph the corpse of his uncle

I WAS just about to call it a day when the phone rang. It was Walter Beamish, suggesting we have dinner together at *Au Gai Penguin,* which, by the way, is one of New York's few authentic French restaurants. "I have a rather unpleasant job on tonight, and I need your cheering company," was the way he put it.

Had I known what a startling denouement was to climaxx that "unpleasant job." —but I didn't, so I accepted the invitation.

Over our Dubonnet (Monsier Gai disapproves of cocktails), Walter opened up.

"That job I referred to is photographing a corpse," he began abruptly, "and to make it worse, it's an uncle of mine, or was, rather. Not that I ever had much to do with him," he added, "for we never got on together. Uncle Fred—he was my mother's brother—didn't like me, and strongly disapproved of my work."

"Why? Didn't he like to have his picture taken?" I asked idly. I may say that Beamish, with whom I roomed during my freshman and sophomore years at Columbia, is the highly paid first assistant in a smart Fifth Avenue studio, is recognized as one of the best portrait men in America, and is an ardent researcher in optics, refraction and such other sciences appertaining directly or indirectly to photography.

"Like to have his picture taken?" Walt literally snorted. "Why, darn him! That was one of the things we quarreled over. I begged him again and again to sit for me—the old boy would have made a wonderful subject—marvelous type—but it was an obsession with him. I once jokingly accused him of having some criminal reason to fear having a picture made, and he flew into a rage, his eyes actually seeming to glow with animal fire, and ordered me never to enter his home again. That was years ago, but he never forgave me and I never saw him again—didn't know he was dead until my aunt phoned me today. She always wanted a picture of him, but nothing doing. Guess she figured now was her chance. At any rate she asked me to come tonight and take a picture of him in his coffin."

"Creepy sort of business, I should think," I observed.

"Oh, it's not unusual," Walter replied. "I've done it several times in the way of business. It's really easier than a regular picture. No difficulty about the pose, for one thing. And we always charge extra," he grinned. "Of course there's nothing in tonight's job—cash, I mean. I'm only too glad to oblige my aunt, who is as decent as the dear departed was the reverse. Oh, well, funny how things work out; I'll get my picture after all—but unless I fake the setting , it won't be a study I can exhibit."

The conversation drifted to other matters, and the dinner progressed through its several excellent courses until, comfortably filled with a sense of well-being and the result of Monsieur Gai's culinary skill, we separated, Beamish to go on his gruesome errand, I to my room to dig into an abstract of title. I might mention that I am an attorney, employed by one of the big title companies.

TWO or three weeks passed with no further word from Beamish, and I had about forgotten our dinner and his engagement with a corpse when again the telephone brought both to my mind. It was Beamish, phoning me at my apartment.

"Hello! Jim? Walt speaking," he began. "Say, you remember that little job I had on hand the last time we had dinner together? Uncle Fred, you know?"

"Sure! Sure!" I replied, half jokingly. "The late lamented was to sit for his portrait in spite of himself. How did it turn out? Did mind triumph over matter and the corpse arise and smash the camera?" Perhaps my remarks might be considered in questionable taste, but, first, I knew Walter well enough to feel sure he would not take offense, and, second, I knew with what scientific matter-of-factness he always regarded his work. To Walter, I felt sure, photographing a dead man—uncle or a stranger—was merely part of the day's routine.

For a moment there was a dead silence, and I began to have qualms as to just how impersonally Walter had taken my jocularity. Then his voice came—and even over the wire it seemed oddly strained.

"Eh—no—not exactly," he said. "But it was a rather rum business at that. Can you come over to the studio?"

"Sure thing! What time?" I replied, thinking he referred to the following day, since it was now nearly ten o'clock. Thus I was the more surprised at his answer.

"Now," came over the phone. "I'm at the studio now. I've been away on an out-of-the-city assignment, and only got back this afternoon. Been cleaning up a lot of things here—among them my uncle's picture." Again a pause. "That's what I want to see you about. You'll come?" His voice shot up an octave on the question, and, startled and uneasy without knowing exactly why, I assented.

OF COURSE it was raining—a dismal, cold, penetrating downpour, and as I walked to the corner, alert for a taxi, I mentally anathematized Walter and his uncle for having brought me out. As a bachelor, I may lack some of the home comforts of my married friends, but an open fireplace in my living-room and a reasonably well-stocked wine cupboard atone for much.

The Fifth Avenue building in the fifties in which Walt's employer has his expensive studio was dark as the taxi drew up, but a light shone on the fifth floor and a push on the bell brought a surly watchman who admitted me.

Walter himself opened the studio door and I learned we two were the sole occupants of the premises.

"I've been doing some work on my own after Simmons left," he explained, naming the head of the developing-room. "Among other things, I developed my uncle's picture," he went on abruptly, and I fancied —was it only fancy?—a tremor in his voice. "Come and look at it!"

He led the way into the dark room, then turned. "The subject"—he became suddenly and I think unconsciously professional in his speech and manner—"was photographed as he lay in his coffin. The casket was on the usual trestles, and I pushed back some palms and flowers so as to be able to focus my camera directly on the face and upper part of the body. Of course I had the camera mounted on a tripod such as we use for such shots. The casket was partly closed, you understand, but the face, shoulders and chest of the subject were clearly exposed to the lens."

Walter's voice was jerky, his words clipped, as of a man under intense nervous strain who takes refuge in the commonplaces of his trade. He regarded me stiffly for a moment, then turned to a metal stand and picked up a print. Silently he handed it to me. Silently I took it.

This is what I saw.

The end of an elaborate casket. A few leaves obtruding around the margin. The vague outline of a head. The gleaming shirt front and black lapels that denoted evening clothes. But where the face should have been was only a glare of light.

I took this to be merely a spoiled exposure—probably an electric light bulb had fronted the camera's lens, causing the negative to be light-struck. But even as I gazed, it seemed as if I could discern in that nimbus of light a more deeply glowing pair of eyes. Mocking, triumphant, they seemed actually to shine with animal fire.

Then as I turned the print in my hands the semblance of eyes vanished, nor could I again capture the illusion—if illusion it was—no matter how I turned and re-turned the photograph.

The expression on my friend's face showed me he knew what I had seen.

"In God's name!" I gasped; "what does it mean?"

"What does it mean?" he echoed hollowly. "Why, it just means that Uncle Fred held to his resolution. Alive or dead, he wouldn't be photographed!"

"His eyes, his ears, his throat were tortured with choking dust."

The Sitter in the Mound

By BRUCE BRYAN

Faverly was an archeologist, a robber of graves, and fearful was his discovery in that weird Indian burial mound

FAVERLY came out to meet me just before sundown. I had been plowing that flat field adjacent to the bottomland, and together we drove the weary team homeward. The sun was just slipping behind that low, sinister-looking mound over by the river, and already the early spring warmth was deserting the air.

Perhaps that is why I shivered. It couldn't have been anything else that caused that momentary, almost reflexive shudder to run through my body. There was nothing particularly suggestive in the mound's outward appearance, despite the few rotting headboards and a couple of crumbling crosses indicating the presence of long-forgotten pioneer graves. Nor was I at all superstitious.

I say *was*. . . .

As for Faverly—there was nothing in his manner to set him apart from other men except the quiet staidness that always seems to mark the scholar. He had been with us only a day or two, but he seemed to enjoy my company even though I was at least ten years his junior.

Naturally, I felt not a little flattered. He was a largish man, with an angular gait and a Websterian dome under a great shock of unruly black hair. Knowledge seemed written all over him, and I rather pictured him addressing a scientific conclave than seeking the companionship of a country yoke; though, of course, I had ambitions of my own, too.

He had come to our farm as a "paying guest" on the recommendation of a mutual friend as the ideal place in which to hide away from everything but Nature itself. He wanted, he explained, a long rest. Even a man engaged in his profession, it seems, eventually reaches a point of saturation that calls out insistently for relief. And his doctor had told him that the plea of overtaxed nerves was not one to go indefinitely unheeded.

A vacation was what he wanted, and if a man can't find forgetfulness from his usual routine in the peaceful Ohio valley, with the nearest town eight or nine miles away and the neighbors out of shouting distance, it must be because he doesn't recognize it when he's introduced to it. But just what he sought to forget I didn't find out until later.

After the evening chores were done, we would sit in a pair of stiffly uncomfortable chairs and the sagging porch of the old frame house, if the air permitted, and talk about everything under the sun. I repeat that I was inwardly gratified to observe the apparent interest so erudite a person took in my obviously banal conversation. But gradually I discovered that a man will sometimes seize eagerly at trivialities, especially if he is trying to put something else out of his mind.

At first, of course, we only met at evening. My own vacation was far from being what the term implies. I was planning

to complete my senior year at the university next semester, and inasmuch as my father had managed to scrape up the necessary expense money, I felt it incumbent on me to take the place of the hired man he had to let go. So my daylight hours were taken up by the kind of toil that wrings honest sweat from a man's brow.

BEYOND the fact that Faverly was an archeologist of some repute, we knew little of him. He worked for a museum in Minneapolis, but never brought the subject up for question or discussion. For the first day or so at the farm he slept late in the morning, ate a combination breakfast and lunch, and then disappeared until suppertime with a book under his arm or a fishing-rod over his shoulder.

Then he found that strolling out to meet me as I came in each evening from my day's work constituted a cooling and effortless exercise. However, this was the first time he had come as far as the outlying field.

I hailed him as he started to pick his way across the newly turned furrows, and he waited until I came up and joined him.

"Afraid I might turn my ankle?" he asked, with a smile. "Maybe I don't look it now, but I was actually born on a farm—years ago." He sighed. "So many years, indeed, that a horse is still pretty much of a novelty to me. Mind if I drive the team in?"

As I surrendered the reins to him, I noticed for the first time the curious ring on the middle finger of his left hand. There was something incongruous about it. The band was of gold, but in it was set an oddly carved turquoise. For some reason the combination made me think of a "June-and-December" wedding.

"Oh," said Faverly, in reply to my casual query, "it's just a sort of—well, you might call it a keepsake. I had it set in a ring as a reminder of a rather narrow escape."

He stopped suddenly, as if he had said more than he meant to. His gaze swerved aside.

I had to repeat my "How's that?" because his eyes had wandered off beyond the field to the grassy, tree-covered hummock that rose up out of the river bottoms.

"Eh?" His mind seemed to come back with a jerk. He smiled almost regretfully.

I put the question to him again. He hesitated.

"I really came here to forget about it," he said then, as if reluctantly. "But I guess there's no reason why I shouldn't tell you. There's a fever in my blood—yes, that's what it must be! I'm an archeologist, you know, but plenty of people might better call me a ghoul. Of course, we pride ourselves that our digging is solely for scientific knowledge, but I suppose it amounts to the same thing in the end. Despoiled graves! Human jackals! After all, grave-robbing is grave-robbing, whatever the motive. It's a lust."

He laughed and pointed to the mound down by the river. It was low and conical in shape, but the gathering shadows caused it to grow in size until it dominated the flat countryside.

"Speaking of Indian mounds," resumed Faverly, "that's one, isn't it?"

"I don't know," I replied. "It might be. I've plowed up a lot of arrowheads and chunks of old pottery hereabout. But some of the early pioneers who settled this valley are buried there. You can still find fragments of rotted old crosses sticking out of the ground. What's that got to do with the close shave you mentioned?"

Faverly's expression clouded, as if with unpleasant reminiscence.

"There were two of them, as a matter of fact. If there'd only been one it might seem sort of ridiculous. But after the second—so like the first—I rather lost my grip. Three strikes is out, you know!" He grinned wryly.

I waited patiently, feeling called on for no comment.

"It was on an expedition in the Hopewell area," went on Faverly after a moment. "We'd opened a burial mound and found the old chief in his rock-lined crypt. It was an unusual type of burial, for instead of lying supine the skeleton was seated in a crouched position on a throne-like slab. On its chest, hanging from the neck, was a copper breastplate in the center of which was set a roughly carved turquoise.

"It was while I was reaching for this pectoral that the trench, which was about fifteen feet deep at this point, caved in on me. By the time they had dug me out I was nearly done in. But when I came to, I found the green stone clasped in my palm. The experience shook me up a bit, but not for long. As you can see, the turquoise is carved in the shape of the sacred Thunderbird. So I had it made into a ring, more from sentiment, perhaps, than because of its ornamental qualities."

Again his eyes drifted off to that mound, now steeped in gloom behind us. There was an almost predatory look in them.

"The next time," continued Faverly, after we had trudged for possibly fifty yards in silence, "was at a site some two hundred miles removed. Again we had uncovered the central inhumation in an ancient mound. You can believe it or not, Grey, but as I crawled into that hollow burial crypt and stared at the fleshless cadaver lolling awkwardly on its stone seat —I could have sworn I was back in the first!

"Everything seemed identically the same, the low rectangular vault, the posture of the skeleton, even the copper breastplate. There was only one discordant note: *where the turquoise should have been set in the metal pectoral was only an empty socket!*"

He paused. And as I tried to visualize the macabre scene I thought I detected a breathless sort of catch to his voice. Resisting an impulse to look back toward that darkness-enshrouded mound behind us, I felt that he was waiting for some remark on my part.

"Of course," I said slowly, "it was only a notion, induced by your previous experience."

"Perhaps," agreed Faverly, looking at me oddly. "But as I leaned over to examine the thing—the whole world seemed to fall in on me. This time I didn't get off so easily. Three of my ribs were broken, and it took the men who dug me out nearly half an hour to resuscitate me!"

He clucked the horses around a shallow pit. And again I saw him turn his head to look behind.

"So that's why you decided to give up the work and take a rest?" I ventured.

"Exactly," he nodded. "But as I said just now, it must be something in my blood. Maybe my ancestors were 'night doctors'." He laughed, without amusement. "At any rate, whenever I see some old Indian earthwork, I'm never at ease until I'm delving into it with pick and shovel."

WE STRODE along behind the team in silence. As the old red barn came into view, Faverly cleared his throat nervously.

"By the way," he asked, with too studied a casualness, "is that mound back there situated on your property?"

"Yes," I said reluctantly. "We own down to the high-water mark on the river."

He hesitated again, then burst out abruptly:

"Do you suppose your father'd mind if I drove a trench through it? Looks to me as if it belongs to the Hopewell culture. I'm planning a monograph on that period and it might be——"

It was my turn to hesitate. Then I kicked myself mentally for the crazy

thoughts that were running through my mind.

"It'd be all right with Dad," I assured him. "But I'm not so certain about the neighbors. They have their local superstitions, you know. And there's a tradition that anyone who digs into the Indian mounds in this vicinity will bring down a horrible curse on his head. Besides, there are those pioneer graves."

Faverly's eyes gleamed with a rabid enthusiasm.

"We wouldn't need to touch them," he told me. "And as for the curse—what do you think?"

I shrugged. What was my opinion to a man like Faverly?

And so it was arranged that night at supper. My father, while not a superstitious man, gave his consent somewhat diffidently. His only compunction was the possible antagonism of such hard-shelled neighbors as we had, some of whom were said to be directly descended from the old-timers interred in the mound.

Next morning at dawn I set out to resume my plowing. Faverly met me at the barn to get picks and shovels. He'd hired several young Negroes to serve as laborers, and planned to drive an exploratory trench right through the heart of the ancient hummock. I wished him luck and went on about my work.

From time to time during the day I looked across the field toward the mound, but as Faverly was driving his trench from the far side I was unable to see him. But that evening, just as I finished the last furrow, he came plodding over to meet me.

"Good hunting?" I asked carelessly.

"Great!" he exploded. "You could never guess. I want you to come over and take a look while it's still light."

NODDING acquiescence, I accompanied him down to the river bottoms. Circling the mound, I stared at his excavation. Faverly's helpers had been dismissed for the day, but we followed the trench to the center of the great barrow and peered into the yawning burial crypt burrowed out of its very core. Crouching down, we crawled part-way in.

Faverly produced a flashlight. "You won't believe this," he whispered, looking at me queerly. Then he directed the beam of the torch into the vault.

A whistle of surprise escaped my lips. It was the first thing of the sort I had ever seen.

The crypt was roughly rectangular, low-roofed and lined with fairly uniform slabs of stone. On the hard-packed floor were rotted bows and arrows, stone spearheads, several pieces of broken pottery and some charred corncobs. But in the very center of the burial chamber was a crudely throne-like stone seat.

Sprawled loosely on this primitive throne was a moldering skeleton.

I can remember today the curiously evil expression its slack-jawed death's-head grin conveyed. But even more clearly do I recall the hammered copper breastplate that hung from its jointed neck—a pectoral that might once have been inlaid with turquoise, except that the single inlay socket was empty!

I stared at Faverly. I couldn't figure out whether he was afraid or not. At least, he was breathing hard, but that may have been merely the elation of the born scientist at a new discovery.

"The bones are in fair condition!" he exclaimed tersely. "Help me put them in this box and we'll carry them back with us. If we leave the skeleton here the air will decompose it."

I felt more like getting out of that charnel place while the getting was good. In my imagination, I seemed to see those slabbed walls bulging inward. But I stayed. It didn't take long to transfer the bones to the box. Then we went back after the

team and continued on to the farmhouse. While I stabled and fed the horses, Faverly deposited the box in a vacant stall in the barn.

That night at supper my father reported that several of the neighbors had been over to protest against what they regarded as a desecration of the dead. They warned him that no good could come of it. But having given his permission to open the mound, my father refused to retract it.

As with most country folk, my parents retired early. Faverly and I sat for a while on the porch, however, to enjoy the cool spring air. The archeologist in him had completely superseded the purpose for which he had come to our farm. Our conversation turned, naturally enough, to the prehistoric natives who had left their remains in the form of earthworks scattered throughout the Ohio River valley.

Briefly, he sketched the story of the ancient Mound Builders as gleaned from his researches, rating them second only to the Pueblоans of the Southwest in aboriginal cultural development. But, he concluded, the race was practically extinct at the time Ponce de Leon came into the country on his mad search for the Fountain of Youth.

"Say!" I exclaimed suddenly, my imagination fired by the magic of his words, "I'm all through with that field! How about my helping you with the excavation tomorrow?"

Faverly smiled.

"So you want to become a grave-robber, too?" he asked, his mood changing.

"It's not grave-robbing," I denied impatiently. "Those old redskins have been dead for centuries."

"Then Time is both the answer and the excuse?" parried the scientist. "Perhaps you are right. Five hundred years ago I'd have been burned at the stake for disinterring the dead. Today no one cares, except the superstitious. If I looted a modern grave in some city cemetery I'd get a prison sentence; if I robbed the same grave a few centuries hence I'd be doing it with the benediction and financial backing of some scientific institution. It's all very amusing, in a way. Do you recall the line in that poem that went, 'My God, how lonely the dead are!' Sometimes I wonder if they are not jealous of their loneliness."

This was a line of philosophy in which I could not take an intelligent part, so after it was agreed that I should join him in his work next day, we said good-night.

EARLY the following morning, after waiting in vain for the Negro boys to show up, Faverly and I shouldered our tools and set out for the mound.

"We don't really need the superstitious fools," remarked the archeologist. "The heavy part of the work is all done."

But as we came up to the mound we were stunned. The entire excavation, including a ten or twelve foot trench, had been completely filled in.

"It couldn't possibly be the wind," stammered Faverly.

"Must be some of the neighbors," I hazarded weakly. "They didn't like the idea in the first place. I'll bet they came here last night and shoveled all this dirt back in."

The scientist's jaw set stubbornly.

"Then we'll just dig it out again," he announced grimly. "Fortunately, the earth is still loose."

And so we did. But when we came again to that rock-lined burial crypt and found the skeleton sitting placidly in the same posture in the same place, I felt a violent nausea in the pit of my stomach.

Faverly stared at it for several moments as if he doubted the evidence of his eyes. His face was paper-white, and he glanced involuntarily at the walls that surrounded us, as if he momentarily expected them to fall in.

Drawing a deep breath, he began painstakingly to transfer the dried bones into another box. I held the flashlight for him and I recall distinctly, as insignificant things often stick in one's memory, how the turquoise stone in his ring almost balefully reflected the rays of the light.

When we reached the barn with the second box of bones from the mound, Faverly went right to the box he had deposited in the stall the night before. It was there, all right, but it was empty. Faverly turned and looked at me, and now there was a hint of fear in his eyes. But I've got to hand it to him for nerve.

"Your neighbors are clever," he said, with a grating laugh. "I really don't see how they reassembled the skeleton. Even an accomplished anatomist couldn't rearticulate loose bones without wire or something to hold them in place. But they've gone to a lot of useless trouble if they're trying to frighten me off."

We said nothing to my father about what had happened. And after supper, when we were alone on the porch, Faverly was reluctant to discuss it. So at last I yawned and remarked that I was turning in.

"I'll finish this pipe," said Faverly. "See you first thing in the morning."

As he inhaled deeply, the bowl of the pipe glowed and the glow was reflected by the green stone on the middle finger of his left hand.

But at breakfast Faverly was missing, Nor did he reply when I knocked on his door. Finally, I turned the knob and entered. His bed had not been slept in. Thinking that perhaps he had gone on ahead without eating, I set out for the mound.

THE morning sun was streaming down, and birds were twittering gayly in willows and sumac. The air had that bracing quality that intoxicates a man with the joy of simply being alive. But as I approached the ancient mound an unexplainable chill settled over me. I stopped dead and stared, a half-muttered curse springing to my lips. What was it Faverly had said, half banteringly, just the other night?

"Sometimes I wonder if they are not jealous of their loneliness!"

The excavation had been filled in again overnight. And Faverly was nowhere in sight.

Overcome by a sudden mad urge, I threw myself feverishly into the task of re-excavating the trench. It took me several hours, and I was sweating like a horse when I finally laid bare once more the opening into the burial vault. For a moment I hesitated, shaken by an unnamed fear. I felt like turning tail and running from the place. But can any man escape his fear simply by turning back? Besides, I had to know—I *had* to know. . . .

I had no flashlight. As I crawled into the opening on hands and knees, I struck a match.

Everything seemed the same as it was before. *Everything*—oh, God!

There was the skeleton, every bone articulated in place, sprawling on its throne-like seat. And there on its hollow breast was the copper plaque with its empty, gaping socket. Yes, empty! I felt an involuntary sigh of relief rising to my lips—then the match burned my fingers and went out.

Hurriedly, I lit another. As it flared up, a reflecting gleam was cast back at me, like the glittering eye of a coiled serpent. My eyes ran it down, focussed on it—and then I dropped the match and fell back out of the low opening with an unrestrained shriek.

There was a dull rumbling sound as my boots scrambled frantically in the loose earth. Like rushing water seeking its own level, the whole mound caved in, demolishing the burial crypt and inundating me to

my knees in the trench. My eyes, my ears, my throat were tortured with choking dust as I fought my way out. But I wasn't even thinking of that—neither of the physical discomfort nor of my narrow escape from death. There are worse things than death. Instead, my mind dwelt with horrible vividness on the grinning skeleton sitting in the mound.

On that grinning skeleton—and the turquoise ring that gleamed from the middle finger of its bony left hand!

The Hills of Kandahar

By ROBERT E. HOWARD

The night primeval breaks in scarlet mist;
The shadows gray, and pales each silent star;
The eastern sky that rose-lipped dawn has kissed
Glows crimson o'er the hills of Kandahar.
A trumpet song re-echoes from afar;
Across the crags the golden glory grows
To drive the shades, renewing ancient war;
Now bursts full bloom the gorgeous morning rose.

These are the hills that many a sultan trod;
Their rocks have known full many a victor's stride;
These peaks could tell their tale of human pride—
See where they rear, each like a somber god.
Aye, they have gazed since first the primal dawn
Fired with a wild, vague flame a bestial soul
Who rose and stood and saw his fellow spawn
With him, somehow, part of Creation's whole,
And made himself immortal with a goal
To be attained—this untaught simian faun.

Aye, but these peaks have known the human tread:
The ebb and flow of dim humanity,
The restless, surging, never-ceasing tide,
The swarming tribes that came unceasingly;
The lust of kings, the bloody war-dawn's red,
The races that arose and ruled—and died.
They will be brooding when mankind is gone;
The teeming tribes that scaled their barricades—
Dim hordes that waxed at dusk and waned at dawn—
Are but as snow that on their shoulders fades.

"A kaleidoscope of pale tortured faces swirled past, to disappear into the dull mist of eternity."

The Man Who Came Back

By FREDERIC ARNOLD KUMMER, Jr.

The genius of a great scientist brought back to vigorous life the soldiers who had fallen in battle, and a ruthless dictator tried to claim them for his own

THE tall pines lining the mountainside were like dark, shrouded figures. Ahead, the road wound endlessly upward in ever-mounting spirals. The robot-like chauffeur at the wheel of the little car presented a stolid, impassive back; he had not spoken since we left Belgrade five hours before. Once again I glanced at the slip of paper in my hands.

"A matter of the most vital importance demands your presence," it read. "As a comrade of the late Eric Naetzel you cannot refuse to help. The bearer of this message will drive you to your destination. Refuse to come and you will always regret it."

Reading the letter over for the twentieth time did not make it any more clear. The peremptory tone of the message was disturbing, yet in spite of the warning note in the last sentence, it seemed to express urgency rather than any threats. The reference to Eric Maetzel, in particular, was puzzling. At the outbreak of the terrible war of 1980 he and I had been drafted at the same time, thrown into the same squad, become fast friends. In the savage fighting around Prague, however, that friendship had been broken. A stratoplane, spitting explosive bullets, had dived. When it zoomed up once more, Eric had been only a ghastly, blood-stained corpse and my left foot so badly shattered that its amputation had been necessary. And now, two years after the end of the war, this queer letter, bringing bitter memories. Foolish of me, perhaps, to have embarked upon so mysterious a mission, yet the mention of Eric . . .

A drone high above the gloomy mountains reached my ears. Glancing upward, I saw a squadron of war planes, dark ravens against the gray sky. Sight of them filled me with ominous forebodings. Out of the chaos that followed the war one man, an ex-army officer, had risen to make himself dictator of the defeated Central-European bloc. And this man, Hjalmar Hajorky, preached the gospel of revenge. Already the Central States, and among them my own beloved nation, were rearming, building planes, guns, tanks. A people ruined by war was being forced to prepare for another holocaust. And the many who, like myself, hated war and Hajorky's hymn of hate, dared not speak; the A.K.R., secret Government police force, had agents everywhere. Peace . . . the world, looking at the rows of graves, the ruined homes, the barren fields, cried for peace. And Hajorky, dreaming of revenge, planned war. One thing alone held him back: lack of man-power. Our casualties in the last struggle had been tremendous. With only a pitiful remnant of our once mighty forces war seemed out of the question; yet a madman like Hajorky might try anything. I stared at the squadron of stratoplanes, shook my head.

The sallow, black-browed chauffeur on

the front seat also glanced upward, frowning, the first sign of emotion he had displayed since leaving Belgrade. He had driven like an automaton all day and now, in the bleak dusk, I was completely lost. Mountains loomed on all sides, but what range I could not tell.

"How much farther?" I asked.

"Soon," the driver grunted, nosing the car ever upward along the winding road.

THAT was as much as I could get out of him; so I settled back in my seat to wait the outcome of this mad adventure. The roadway had narrowed to a mere goat-path and the car, its Diesels humming, barely crawled up the steep, heavily wooded incline. A mile of this followed until we at last reached the crest of the slope. Before us in a cup-shaped hollow was a great castle, hoary with age, its crumbling masonry as gray as bleached bones against the dark clumps of evergreens. A slight mist cloaked its towers in mystery and the dark, deep-set loop-holes peered like sightless eyes at the surrounding hills.

"There!" My chauffeur motioned to the ancient keep, headed toward it.

As the car drew up before the massive pile, I fought down a feeling of foreboding, of fear. The chauffeur grinned cadaverously at my hesitation.

"Go on in," he said, stretching his cramped muscles.

Picking up my crutch, I hobbled across the courtyard, hammered on the huge, iron-studded doors. Slowly, like the portals of some mausoleum, they swung open.

The great hall of the castle was dark, shadowy; windows thick with the dust of years shut off the fading sunlight. A fire crackled at one end of the room, threw eery shadows on the stone floor. Two persons stood before the fire: a man, tall, gray-bearded, his broad shoulders bent; and a slender, dark-eyed girl clad in somber black. Oddly enough, I found a certain familiarity in the girl's face, a haunting recollection that I could not place.

"Ah!" The tall man moved forward, bowing ceremoniously. "You are Lieutenant Josef Grentz?"

"I was, during the war. Your message?"

"So! It was good of you to come." Again he bowed. "I am Doctor Hans Vettner. And this is my daughter, Anna."

I studied the girl's face closely as I shook hands with her. The death-like pallor of her cheeks, the deepness of her large eyes, gave a queer impression of unreality. Yet somehow the feeling of familiarity lingered.

"And now"—Vettner stood with his back to the fire, rubbing long nervous hands—"I suppose I should explain. In the first place, you were a friend of Eric Maetzel."

"I was with him when he died," I murmured. "But I don't see——"

"Did—did he suffer much?" The girl touched my sleeve, her gaze intent.

"It was over in a second. I——" Suddenly I remembered the picture Eric had carried with him during those years of hell —a dirty, thumbed photograph, yet treasured beyond all his possessions. Across the bottom of it had been written, "All my love. Anna."

"You were his fiancée?" I muttered. "The girl he——"

"My daughter and Eric were engaged." Vettner nodded solemnly. "But to continue my explanation. I am a psychologist. In certain work I am undertaking I need the assistance of a skilled bio-chemist. You were showing signs of prominence in that field before the war."

"Before the war!" I echoed bitterly. "Now . . . what does Hajorky care about health, the prolongation of life? If I were a munitions expert or a breeder of disease germs——"

"True." Vettner inclined his gray leonine head. "But you will find here

work worthy of your intelligence. Unbelievable work—so unbelievable that I dared not explain in my letter for fear you would think it the ravings of a madman. You may still think so when I explain what I hope to do. Yet I am hoping you will share my belief."

VETTNER paused, his hollow eyes boring past me across the hall. I turned to follow his gaze, but the great room was empty. The girl Anna, her death-white face drawn, was nodding slightly, as though listening to far-off music or voices we could not hear. Rigid she stood, not moving a muscle, yet her long black dress swayed slightly as if someone had brushed past her. Somewhere a dog was howling, howling, endlessly.

Soft, shuffling footsteps sounded on the stone floor behind me. Whirling, I saw the dark, bony figure of my erstwhile chauffeur, now clad in a butler's costume.

"Dinner is ready," he croaked, bowing.

With these words the spell was broken. The fire blazed up brightly and the chilling, musty dampness that had gripped me disappeared. The girl Anna, suddenly weak, leaned heavily upon her father's arm.

"Come," Vettner said solemnly. "Let us eat!"

The dining-room was large, apparently the feast hall of olden days. A moldering black tapestry hung upon its walls, a tapestry depicting in faded figures the Dance of Death. Once again that feeling of being in a great tomb took possession of me. The oblong, coffin-shaped table, with its two tall tapers, the monstrous, evil shadows that crept about the corners of the room, the dog outside, howling . . . howling. . . .

The table, I noticed, was set for four. Sarth, the sallow, vulpine butler, served the empty place with scrupulous care, removing the untouched dishes at the end of each course. Indeed, I believe I was the only one who ate; Doctor Vettner and his daughter seemed only to touch the food to their lips. When this strange, silent repast had been finished, the doctor took my arm.

"You will be tired after your long drive," he muttered. "I'll show you to your room."

I turned to Anna, a pallid wraith in the flickering candlelight, bade her goodnight. A slight nod was her only acknowledgment. Shrugging, I followed Vettner from the dining-room, up the massive stone staircase. Our footsteps echoed hollowly along the corridor of the second floor. A weary wind sighed about the old building, and once I saw a huge bat fluttering before one of the cobwebbed windows. At the doorway of a small, cell-like room Vettner paused.

"I trust you will be comfortable here," he said, lighting a candle. "Your duties commence in the morning. I have an adequate supply of chemicals and apparatus in my laboratory. We will need large quantities of synthetic protoplasm."

"Protoplasm?" I repeated. "But——"

"There will be explanations . . . later." Vettner bowed ceremoniously. "Goodnight, Lieutenant Grentz!"

I watched him disappear around a corner of the corridor, and re-entered my room. Its only furniture was a high-canopied bed, a chair, and a curiously carved clothes-chest. On the chest was an old leather-bound Bible. Idly I picked up the book, glanced at its flyleaf. Written in bold script upon the otherwise blank page was an excerpt from the Apostle's Creed. "I believe in the resurrection of the body . . ."

Outside, the dog continued its frenzied howling.

2

THE next morning I awoke early, hobbled downstairs. Neither the doctor nor his daughter was in evidence. Sarth,

the butler, served breakfast in silence; all my efforts to draw him out were in vain.

When I had finished eating, Sarth motioned for me to follow him. Across the great hall, down a winding flight of stone steps he led me, deep into the dank subcellars of the castle. On and on we went, through a confusing maze of tunnels, arched rooms, and rough-hewn galleries, their sweated walls gleaming in the light of Sarth's lantern. At length we reached a small chamber lined with beakers, retorts, crucibles—a veritable alchemist's den deep underground. Sarth lit candles, and, bowing profusely, left me alone.

Bewildered, I glanced about the little laboratory. A slip of paper on the workbench caught my eye. "Ten kilograms of protoplasm," was written upon it, followed by a list of other substances which, apparently, I was expected to manufacture: fibrous matters, dyes, calcium, a variety of seemingly unrelated compounds. For a long moment I stared at the list, wondering. Again that cold, chilling sensation which I had experienced the night before swept over me. Eric Maetzel . . . Eric Maetzel. . . . Memory of him beat at my brain. Something . . . something soft and intangible brushed my arm. I whirled about, wild-eyed, but the room was empty. Shuddering, I bent over the table, plunged into my allotted work.

It was three days before I finished. During that time I saw nothing of my host or his daughter.

On the evening of the third day, just as I was about to leave the laboratory, Vettner appeared in the doorway, his somber eyes glowing.

"You have finished?" he murmured. "Ah, good, good!" Again that nervous rubbing of his long, bony hands. "I have been a poor host these past few days, I fear. Anna has been so excited, feverish over the preparations. Ah, but we must be careful! Trust no one, not even Sarth! Hajorky and his agents were following my experiments so closely when I was in Belgrade! We fled at night, Lieutenant, secretly, came here. So far, I believe, he has not located us. If he should learn of my discoveries——"

Vettner broke off, glancing at my stump of a foot. "War, Lieutenant! War with its death, its cripples, its broken-hearted women!"

I studied the doctor's tortured face, convinced that I was dealing with a madman. And yet . . .

"What is this discovery that Hajorky seeks?" I asked.

The doctor eyed me closely, appraisingly, then bent forward, whispered hoarsely.

"Man-power! The secret of unlimited man-power! Trained soldiers, the military genius of the ages! You realize, do you not, that a man dead for as long as fifteen minutes can be brought back to life by an injection of adrenalin into the heart? If deterioration of the body cells were checked, it might be fifteen days, fifteen years, fifteen centuries!"

"True," I nodded. "But that is only in cases where no bodily organs are destroyed. With people eaten up by disease, blown to bits in wars——"

"So I, too, reasoned," Vettner chuckled, caressing his beard. "But the soul, the ego, is a powerful force. Why, if its body has been destroyed, cannot it create a new one from, shall we say, raw materials? At Lourdes and other shrines, among the mystics of India, sick persons have been cured by pure force of mind, cripples enabled to walk, diseased tissue replaced by new. Furthermore, stigmata have been made to appear, the heart-beats controlled by power of the will. Several years ago I treated a man who had lost a finger at the front; sheer force of will enabled him to grow a new one, just as a lizard can grow a new tail. Now if the power of the ego can create new tissue, why cannot that same

power, the soul, create new cells, a new body, from protoplasmic matter? Thus—"

He turned as Sarth's lean figure appeared on the threshold. "Yes?"

"Miss Anna wishes to see you at once!" Sarth muttered. "She told me to tell you that *he* will be ready tonight!"

"So soon!" the doctor exclaimed. "Ah, well! She will be happy at last, my poor child! Sarth, you may have the rest of the week off. Take the car and leave at once. Lieutenant, you will go to your room. Wait until I come for you."

In silence I obeyed. Mad . . . he was unquestionably mad. Tomorrow I would escape, head for the nearest village. Tonight, however, I was forced to humor him.

Slowly I climbed the stairs, entered my room.

IT WAS close to midnight when Vettner knocked on my door. He was dressed in funereal black and seemed more nervous than usual. I followed him down through the gloomy cellars, into the laboratory.

My place of work had undergone a complete change since I had left it. The litter of apparatus, of chemical equipment, had been taken away, except for the large vats containing the protoplasmic mixture. Near the vats was a mass of strange machinery, queer engines. A black-draped dais stood in the center of the room; two red-cupped candles such as are used in churches filled the room with a lurid, ruddy light.

Before the dais stood Anna. The sight of her sent a chill of horror through my veins. The girl's cheeks glowed feverishly, her eyes were fixed, staring, and she was clad in white, a wedding dress! A living corpse, she seemed, animated by some alien, supernal force. I think it was her air of expectancy, of anticipation, that shook me more than anything else.

As we entered the laboratory, the girl did not turn. Her lips, however, moved slightly.

"Hurry!" Anna's voice was thick, strained, in the manner of a person talking in sleep. "He is near, anxious to return. Quick, before others in his world break the link between us!"

She swayed slightly, straining under a mighty mental effort. Vettner crossed the room, adjusted the tangle of queer apparatus. A thousand dim atavistic memories began to crawl through my brain. Life, life that was only a disembodied will, seemed to fill the room. Terrible mephitic forces surged like a silent gale, racking my body with their ebb and flow. The veil of the Infinite was thinning, permitting glimpses of dark, fleeting shadows. I could hear sounds of distant music—wild, unearthly music, at once sublime and terrible —a veritable symphony of death. The room seemed peopled by strange figures, gray spirits of eld, ghosts of buried centuries, their eyes shining with an eager, uneasy gleam. Low, broken voices muttered incoherently, a kaleidoscope of pale tortured faces swirled past to disappear into the dull mist of eternity. Life—life beyond the grave—caught in the grip of unholy forces, drawn into a mad, macabre maelstrom. And all the while Anna stood as though frozen, a frail white figure against the raging cosmos.

Suddenly, from this chaos of stark, soul-shaking power, a single entity crystallized. The personality of Eric Maetzel dominated all else, a terrible mind-force, a being in another world, striving to break through.

Vettner, crouched beside his machine, touched a lever. A fine, mist-like spray shot forth, hanging in an opaque cloud over the dais . . . protoplasm, the primal factor of all living matter.

Anna's face grew gray, as though she were pouring out the energy, the vital forces of her slender body, in an effort to aid her dead lover.

"Eric!" she whispered. "Eric!"

The cloud was growing more dense now, taking on a vaguely columnar shape. The strange music was loud, hammering at my ears in a thunderous yet melancholy chant. Leaning limply upon my crutch, I watched, awe-struck. The mist was gathering into human form . . . the form of a tall, broad-shouldered man. With each passing moment the features were becoming more and more distinct. No mistaking that firm jaw, that strong, determined mouth. Eric Maetzel was taking shape before my eyes!

THE mist began to fade, slowly, the figure became more tangible, more life-like. Eric, the brave, uncomplaining Eric, who had been my comrade in arms during those long years of hell! The same, even down to the rough cotton shirt, the high army boots.

"Eric!" I cried, and he smiled as if in recognition.

Doctor Vettner, still bent over the machine, touched a lever. Abruptly the humming motor ceased. A weary sigh broke from Anna's lips. Suddenly, completely exhausted, she crumpled to the floor.

"Anna! My Anna!" The tall figure on the dais stepped down, knelt beside her. "Darling! I've come back—come back!"

I stared at them stupidly, my mind numbed from the effects of those staggering, titanic forces. I had seen things beyond the scope of reason, things that were not meant for human eyes, and I was dazed, inarticulate.

Anna had come to, now, was smiling up at Eric. Doctor Vettner stood watching them, impassive, tugging at his gray beard. All at once footsteps sounded in the subcellar beyond, crisp, commanding footsteps, and a tall, gray-clad figure appeared in the open doorway. With this new arrival were several uniformed attendants and Sarth, Vettner's servant. As the tall man drew near, light from the flickering candles fell upon his face, throwing into bold relief his harsh, saturnine features.

"Hajorky!" I gasped.

"Swine!" One of the attendants sent me sprawling with a blow from the back of his hand. "You will address the Leader as His Excellency."

Huddled on the floor, I watched them; Vettner staring in bitter accusation at Sarth; Anna, her arms outstretched against the wall as though crucified; Eric, dazed, like a man just awakened from deep slumber. And Hajorky stood there grinning sardonically.

"Unbelievable!" he murmured. "Had I not viewed it all from the next room with my own eyes——"

He broke off, turned to Sarth. "You have done well, Captain. The A.K.R. will be proud of you. Ah, what this will mean to the homeland! Millions of men! Trained soldiers to carry our banners to victory! Men! An inexhaustible supply of men! All Europe, all the world, will be ours! A tremendous scientific feat, Doctor Vettner!"

The doctor did not answer. His eyes were deep pits of hell.

Hajorky turned, his medals winking in the candlelight, spoke sharply to Eric.

"Your name?"

"Eric. Eric Maetzel." My comrade seemed still dazed, confused. Then, as though through instinct, he stepped forward, saluted.

Hajorky reached out, touched Eric's hand, felt his lean hard muscles.

"So," the dictator murmured. "I was afraid perhaps some illusion. . . . Where did you die, Maetzel?"

"Before Prague," Eric answered slowly. "The battle of Bohmer Forest."

"Ah! Bohmer Forest!" Hajorky nodded. "So nearly a great victory! With just ten thousand more men we would have crushed the enemy! Next time we will have the men!" His voice was triumphant. "I will

make you a captain, Maetzel! Tell me of your comrades who were with you . . . beyond the veil?"

Eric frowned, pressed a hand to his forehead.

"I—I cannot remember, now," he murmured. "I seem to recall old Krag—and —and Varhely——"

"Good!" Hajorky nodded. "Call them! Let us see if others can come through!"

"No!" It was Vettner, his voice agonized. "They may not want to come back! Let us leave them in peace."

"You will bring them back. At once." Hajorky's flat black eyes flicked toward Anna.

"You understand, Doctor?"

Vettner stared for a moment, defiant; then his shoulders drooped forlornly. The threat to Anna in the dictator's glance was unmistakable. Bitter, broken, the doctor bent over the delicate mass of machinery, touched a lever.

Once again those dark, monstrous shadows, that solemn, rushing sound of music. Eric stood still, as Anna had stood while calling him from beyond. Roaring noises and that surge of force like a gale swirling through a mountain gorge. The cloud of embryonic matter, the dim miasmic shape, gathering into human form.

A phrase from the Burial Service tolled like a ceaseles bell through my brain: "If, after the manner of men, I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantageth it me if the dead rise not?"

THE misty form was taking definite outline now. I recognized Varhely, the baby of our regiment. Just seventeen, his cheeks were pink, his soft fluffy hair like canary feathers.

"Your name?" Hajorky demanded.

The boy stepped down from the dais, bewildered, then seeing the dictator's uniform, came to attention.

"Vassily Varhely, general," he faltered. "Killed in action at Lake Balaton. An enemy sniper——"

"You will have your revenge! I promise it!" Hajorky exulted. "The enemy shall know the wrath of the men they have slain! You, Doctor, bring back another of my soldiers!"

Doctor Vettner glanced at Anna, a tortured madonna, her back to the wall. Eric and Varhely stood stiffly before the dais. There were tears in the old scientist's eyes as he pulled the lever once more.

For a third time the room rocked and the curtain of darkness parted. Another figure took shape, a stocky, red-faced little man, middle-aged, with kindly blue eyes.

"And your name?" Hajorky snapped.

"Wilhelm Krag." The little man saluted hesitantly. "I—I was the proprietor of a delicatessen in Lemberg. Died of wounds inflicted during the assault on Agram."

"Brave soldier!" Hajorky assumed a dramatic pose, his hand uplifted. "Honor shall be yours when we strike for vengeance! Yours the privilege of dying, not once, but twice, for the homeland! Who among men will be able to say as much?"

As Hajorky finished speaking, a thick silence fell over the room. Huddled in my corner, I could see Vettner's hands tremble, his eyes blink like sputtering embers. Anna had not moved; she seemed a waxen effigy of some saint. The three men from Beyond stood still, as if on review, their eyes troubled. The dictator glanced at his four attendants, among them Sarth, then spoke once more.

"Well," he exclaimed sharply, "have you nothing to say? Are you not proud to be the first of your country's new, all-powerful armies?"

Stiffly old Krag stepped forward.

"I came back in order to see my wife my children," he murmured. "I return to life and you offer me another death, another hour of lying in the dust watching

the puddle of blood grow larger, mad with pain, thinking of the loved ones I shall never see again. This is the honor you offer me?"

Hajorky frowned, gripped his broad leather belt; his gaze sought Varhely.

"And I"—the soft-haired boy joined old Krag—"I returned because I wished to live a life that war cut short. I wanted other memories of this existence than mangled bodies, putrefying flesh. And you offer me vengeance! The enemy lands are poor, impoverished by the last war. What advantage to conquer them? You give us ruined homes, burned fields, broken hearts —and revenge!"

Eric stepped forward, stood beside his companions.

"I returned for love," he cried, "and you give me hate! I am to be an officer, in command of many men! Men! You have forgotten what men are! Ten thousand more men and we would have won at Prague, you say! Pins on a map, moved here and there at will! A game, the sport of dictators. Men! You forget that each pin represents ten thousand pairs of weary feet, ten thousand bleeding bodies, ten thousand brains capable of feeling pain, fear, love! You offer me a chance to be the ten-thousandth part of a pin on a map!"

Hajorky stepped back, his face satanic in the red glare of the lamps.

"Fools!" he shouted. "You will be made to fight! Have you no patriotism, no thought for the welfare of your country?"

"Yes." Little Krag took a step toward the dictator.

"I am willing to return without seeing my wife and children—for my country." And he took another stop forward.

Hajorky backed away, fumbling for the gun at his belt.

"Wha—what does this mean?" he muttered.

"Patriotism!" Krag cried, plunging forward.

Then the room was a hell of roaring explosions, vicious flame. From my corner I saw Doctor Vettner topple backward into his fragile machine, smashing the curious tubes, the tiny wires. I saw Hajorky go down with Krag at his throat, saw the boy Varhely slump to the floor. Eric, twisting a revolver from Sarth's hand, turned on the other attendants, shooting swiftly. And I saw Anna kneel beside her father's body, weeping.

BEFORE I could drag myself erect, pick up my crutch, the struggle had ceased. Eric, Anna and I were the only living persons in the laboratory.

Eric dropped the revolver, joined Anna at her father's side.

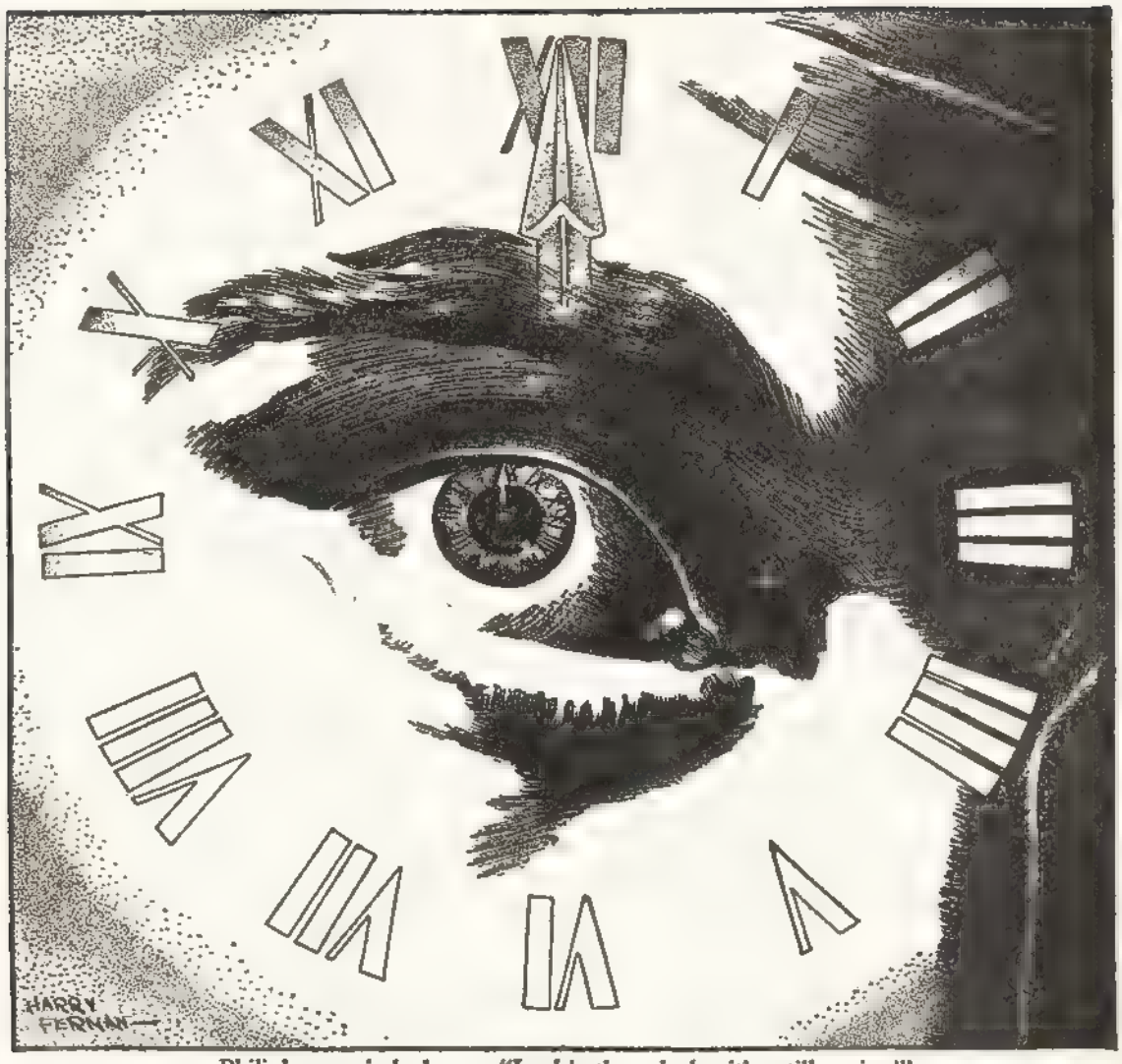
"Don't cry," he whispered. "Your father will be happy there, with your mother once more beside him. Soon—a few short years—and we will be with them again."

He took the girl's arm, turned to me, smiling. "Come, old comrade. Let us go!"

Together the three of us left the castle, mounted the slope that surrounded it.

"And now"—Eric's hand gripped my shoulders—"we must leave you. Your way leads to Belgrade, home. And ours"—he glanced down the steep mountainside—"to some land where there is no danger of my being recognized, of anyone suspecting the secret that was Doctor Vettner's. Until we meet Beyond, then, good-bye!"

I mumbled a halting farewell, watched the two erect figures disappear among the trees—a flutter of white, a flash of sunlight on Eric's sleek hair, and they were lost in the shadows. Turning, I set out along the long road home. The mountain air was cool on my cheek. From the valley below I heard the faint lowing of cattle, the sound of a shepherd's pipes. Peace. . . .



Philip's eyes jerked up. "Look! the clock—it's still going!"

The Stroke of Twelve

By EARL PEIRCE, Jr.

Weird was the thread that linked old Calvert's life with the antique clock, and strange was the fate of him who dared to challenge destiny

THE thick black hands of the grandfather clock pointed to fifteen minutes of midnight. Light from the chandelier, striking the face of the clock obliquely, formed a wedge-shaped shadow between the minute-hand and the hour-hand. The shadow became increasingly smaller. . . .

The three men in the room instinctively watched the clock, each of them silent and intent. The man on the bed scarcely breathed. He supported himself upright by one scrawny elbow, while his rheumy eyes, fixed upon that shadow, bulged out like agates. The man standing between the bed and the clock nervously fingered his stethoscope. Anxiety was written across his face; his eyes were narrow, almost challenging. The last man, gripping the bedpost with a slim white hand that revealed taut tendons, smoked a cigarette jerkily. His face was pale and strained. His eyes, too, were challenging—almost defiant.

For fifteen solid minutes the silence in the room was unbroken by any human voice. Once or twice the man with the stethoscope threw a quick, furtive glance at the man on the bed, but he did not speak. Wind howled shrilly outside, and rats, excited by the storm, scampered noisily back and forth in the walls of the old house. But all of these sounds were faint, disturbing whispers within the room. They simply added to that oppressive, mounting tension.

Suddenly, clearly, the single chime of the hour rang from the old clock. There was a moment of breathlessness. Both standing men turned abruptly to the figure on the bed.

The invalid, removing his eyes from the clock, smiled faintly.

"You see?" His words were a gasp. "The hour has struck. God has granted me another reprieve. I shall live twelve more hours at least."

He sank back on the bed with a sigh. His breathing became more strenuous in his relief. Faint drops of perspiration shone on his jaundiced brow.

The man at the bedside—the physician—ran a distracted hand through his graying hair. He shook his head; his blunt features were hard with incredulity.

"I simply can't believe it," he muttered hoarsely.

A sound greatly like a chuckle came from the man on the bed. "Am I dead or alive?" he asked quietly.

The physician smiled wanly, almost sheepishly.

"I'm as bad a prophet as I am a doctor," he grumbled. "Your case is out of my hands. A greater physician than I is looking after you now, Calvert."

Calvert's head moved slightly in a nod.

"A great Physician: in His covenant with the Calverts He will not fail. . . . You see, Doctor, there are certain things beyond the physical laws. Faith is one of them."

"Then you call this faith?"

Calvert nodded again, still smiling. His pale blue eyes lifted to the clock in a glance of reverential trust.

"Faith," he repeated solemnly.

The doctor, too, looked at the serene old clock. In these last few days he had come to regard it with a very special kind of awe.

The hands pointed to two minutes after twelve.

"Eleven hours and fifty-eight minutes to go," he said. "I'm damned if I don't believe it!"

"Of course you believe it," put in Calvert. "Has it ever failed? I tell you, Doctor, I shall not die until those hands cease to move, and they have never yet stopped excepting upon the stroke of twelve."

"It'll fool you one of these days," said the other dryly.

"Never," affirmed Calvert. "When you sign that death certificate you're carrying around it will be *after* twelve, not before. That's right, isn't it, Philip?"

The man at the foot of the bed, a much younger man, spoke for the first time in over twenty minutes. His voice was adolescently uneven.

"It would seem so, Uncle. Yes; it would seem so."

"Ah," sighed the old man. "The boy is learning to believe in the Calvert covenant with the Almighty. You'll not forget this clock, Philip. One day it will prolong your life as it's prolonging mine."

PHILIP winced, but he did not speak. His face was feverishly warm and moist. He threw a damning glance at the old clock.

The physician also was appraising this strange timepiece. He ran an exploring finger over its smooth cherry and mahogany woodwork; he frowned at its prodigious bulk and its large flat face, encircled with Latin numerals, and the cumbersome metal hands that pointed to five minutes after the hour. It was a weight-driven clock, a relic of the early 1800's; and its maker's name, inscribed upon the face, was barely legible: ZACHARY CALVERT, BOSTON.

"It's a dust-catcher," said the doctor with a shake of his head. "I confess, Calvert, that for a man of wealth you certainly live in an infested shack. I bet this clock—the whole house, for that matter—hasn't had a thorough cleaning since your great-grandfather built it. I'd be curious to expose a petri dish in here and see just what kind of deadly germs I could pick up."

"Germs! Petri dishes!" snorted Calvert. "Get out of here and let me rest. You too, Philip. Leave me with my eleven hours and fifty-five minutes in peace."

The doctor dropped his stethoscope into his satchel. He seemed to regard the instrument with some contempt.

"I wish you would change your mind about having a nurse. You really need hospitalization, y'know. This clock may be all you say it is, but a good, competent R. N. will give better service. . . ." He hesitated at the door, reluctant to leave a patient as deathly ill as Calvert. "I suppose you think you're going to outlive the night," he grumbled good-naturedly. "Well, more power to you. But it's borrowed time, old fellow—borrowed time."

"Borrowed from God," said Calvert. "Now be off, you two! Philip, awaken me at eleven-thirty in case I over-sleep."

"In case you drop into another coma," put in the doctor. "Come along, Philip. Turn down the light and leave him in peace."

The doctor waved a cheery hand and departed. But Philip lingered for a moment; his eyes rested apprehensively on the pallid face of his uncle.

"Are you sure you're all right?" he asked.

"Yes, boy! Don't you see that clock? No power but God's own can stop those hands from reaching twelve again. And then we'll see." He dismissed his nephew with a faint flutter of his thin hand.

Philip confronted the doctor down in the hall.

"It's got me," he cried angrily. "Either the old man is sheer crazy or his damned superstition is true. Last week you told me he would be dead within twenty-four hours. Now look at him! How the devil can you explain it?"

The doctor shrugged.

"I can't. I'm beyond my depth. By every medical precedent your uncle should be in his grave. I simply can't understand where he gets his strength. It's uncanny."

"That clock——" began Philip. "You certainly can't believe that rot about the clock!"

"Humph! What can I believe? He's got a thrombosis. He should have been buried a week ago. If it isn't his faith in the clock that keeps him alive, then what in thunder is it?"

"How should I know? I'm no doctor. But I can't stomach that stuff about the Calverts' covenant with the Almighty."

"Covenant with the devil!" snorted the doctor. "It's a shame for a man to hang

on like that." He batted a hat down on his head and stepped to the door. "But, as I said, more power to him. Let the good God work His wonders as He will. And don't scoff, boy. That clock will be yours some day."

Philip laughed unpleasantly.

"When I inherit that clock I'll chuck it into the nearest trash barrel. It grates on my nerves."

"*If* you inherit it, you mean. From the looks of it your uncle will outlive us both." The doctor grinned maliciously, yanked open the door, and vanished into the rainy blackness outside. The door slammed behind him.

PHILIP stood in the hall staring thoughtfully after the physician's retreat. His parting words echoed annoyingly in his ears. It would be just like his uncle to outlive him—to cheat him of his inheritance.

"It all comes back to that clock," thought Philip. "Damn! If I could only *believe* that superstition. . . ."

His reflections broke up incoherently as they had always done on that subject. He went into the living-room and opened the liquor cabinet. Bourbon, tonight. It would be the fourth consecutive night that his uncle had escaped the clutch of death.

Upstairs in the sick-room the tall case-clock silently measured the minutes, and Calvert lay confidently at rest in its shadow, as if it were the shadow of some beneficent being. . . .

When the physician returned the next day, only a few minutes before noon, he found Calvert in a deep coma. The old man's pulse was hardly perceptible; his face was white and dry; his breathing was a mere inconsequential murmur. It was amazing how he clung to these last paltry moments of life.

"It's the end, Philip," said the doctor after a cursory examination. "No human heart can carry a strain like this. His pulse is weaker than any I've ever seen." He gently extended Calvert's arms lengthwise at his sides and drew the blankets over them. "I'm afraid it's a matter of minutes now, maybe seconds."

The relief in Philip's face was unmistakable. This event had been so long in coming that he could not hide his true emotions. He threw a defiant glance at the clock. It was one minute of twelve.

"He's sinking," whispered the doctor.

Philip did not trust himself to speak. He held his breath; his eyes wavered watchfully between the clock and the sleeper. They would die together—both of these things which he hated above all things on earth. Maybe he would entomb the clock with his uncle. There was poetic irony in the idea.

The doctor stiffened over the bed. He lifted one of Calvert's eyelids with the ball of his thumb. Letting it drop again he met Philip's tense stare.

"Your uncle is dead, Philip."

It was as simple as that. Without any histrionics Philip had come into millions. At last!

Then—as if in mocking celebration—the old clock solemnly struck the hour of twelve.

Philip's eyes jerked up. His lips parted wordlessly; all of an instant he was pale. Finally the words came out:

"Look! The clock—it's still going!"

The physician turned around with a start. He, too, experienced a vague cold feeling as he saw the minute hand creep slowly past the hour. Involuntarily he looked back at his patient. The old man certainly *looked* dead. But one could never tell. Hurriedly the doctor applied his stethoscope to Calvert's chest.

"Good God!" he cried. "His heart's beating!"

Philip grasped the bedpost.

"But you said——"

"I could have sworn," rapped out the doctor. "He *was* dead! Just before the hour struck."

Philip and the doctor exchanged a long glance.

There was a moment of desperate silence between them. The suspicion that impinged upon their minds was too fantastic to be believed. And yet . . .

"The Calverts' covenant," whispered the doctor. "Oh, good heavens! It's mad!"

Philip was tongue-tied. Not once but a dozen times this same thing had happened, and each time the Calvert fortune was snatched from his fingertips by some weird twist of fate. Mad? It was damnable! And as if to taunt him the old clock ticked maddeningly on. . . .

A visible improvement came over the sick man. His breathing became stronger. His fingers twitched; his mouth opened, and then his eyes. One could almost feel the vibrant coagulating of his strength.

He looked up into the doctor's face.

"What—time?" he gasped.

"It's just struck twelve, Calvert." The doctor laid a comforting hand on Calvert's own. "You've been sleeping. But don't talk. You must conserve your energy."

"After twelve!" Calvert's voice rose sibilantly. "You see, Philip! You see! . . . The covenant—I shall live twelve more hours!"

Philip managed to get the words out; they were metallic: "Yes, Uncle."

Calvert sighed. He closed his eyes. He sank back into that death-like slumber. An infuriating trace of a smile remained on his pale lips.

THE doctor took Philip's arm and led him from the room. Neither of them spoke until they were down the stairs.

"It's nothing less than miraculous, Philip. His heart had actually stopped beating. And just as that clock struck——"

Philip threw off the doctor's arm.

"Do you believe that rot? Good Lord, man! It's barbaric!"

"You've got to admit it's a damned odd coincidence."

"Rot!" cried Philip again. "Coincidence, maybe. But the clock hadn't anything to do with it."

"Maybe not." The doctor was warily non-committal. "We'll wait until it stops before we know about that. *If* it stops!"

He went out, and his words remained behind like omens.

During the early evening Calvert regained consciousness and asked for nourishment. Philip grudgingly passed the request on to the butler, for he could not bring himself to prepare the broth with his own hands. Nor could he bear to watch the old man drink it. He stood with his back to the bed, staring moodily out upon the snow-laden trees outside, while behind him Calvert noisily sipped the beverage which kept him alive. To Philip there was something hateful and repugnant in that greedy, toothless sucking. It reminded him of an animal.

His uncle was deceived by Philip's silence.

"You mustn't worry about me, my boy," he advised feelingly. "I'll be with you for a long while yet. With every swing of the pendulum I can feel my health returning."

A wince came into Philip's face which Calvert could not see.

"Have the faith that I have," continued Calvert earnestly. "I'll not leave you alone in the world. We'll have many long years together, Philip."

Philip clenched his teeth in unutterable wrath. "Couldn't the old fool *see?*" he thought bitterly. He could hardly keep the words unspoken.

"And now, my boy, I must rest. Take my tray. . . . You'll be in tonight, won't you? I should hate to be left alone on a night like this. The—rats sound unusually restless tonight. . . ."

"I'll be in, Uncle."

Stone-facedly Philip walked to the bed and lifted the tray. He avoided his uncle's eyes. And if his silence was incriminating he couldn't help it. He carried the loathsome soiled plates to the door.

"Philip!"

"Yes, Uncle?"

"Look in at me later, will you? Sometimes I unconsciously throw the covers off. It—it's such a cold night."

"I'll look in at you, Uncle. Is that all—now?"

"Thank you, boy. That's all."

But it was not all. Time and again Calvert rang; and each time Philip climbed to his room, bringing him hot cocoa, milk-toast, fresh water. Calvert was unusually restless. He couldn't sleep. He began to perspire; his sheets had to be changed, his frail limbs had to be gently dried with a towel. Philip performed these ministrations with a face more brittle than glass: he dared not frown or grimace, as his soul cried for him to do, for fear his steeled self-control would smash to fragments.

The old man was not ungrateful.

"You're a good boy, Philip. You're worthy of the Calvert name—the Calvert covenant."

Philip stoically closed his eyes and felt the blood pound in his temples. A cold, tingling, futile wrath raced through his nerves.

"What time is it, Philip?"

Philip spoke without looking at the clock: "It's eleven-thirty, Uncle."

"So late? I must get some rest." Calvert looked askance at the timepiece, smiling. "When I wake up it will be after twelve again. Ah! That sound does my old heart good! . . . Now leave me, Philip. Don't close the door; I may want something else later when I wake up. Good-night, my boy."

"Good-night, Uncle."

The old man did not notice the ice in his nephew's voice. He sank contentedly into sleep.

PHILIP did not leave. He stood silently, rigidly, at the foot of the bed, and his eyes at rest upon the sleeper were dull with sober thought. He had discovered a plan—a desperate plan, yet a plan so childishly simple that it brought a faint mirthless smile to the corners of his mouth. But would it work? Was the old fool's heart really weak enough? . . . For twenty long minutes he pondered these questions, and then he consigned them to the lap of fate.

Quietly, and with the deliberate unerringness with which a surgeon walks to the operating-table, Philip walked to the clock. It was just three minutes of midnight.

"Uncle," he said. "Uncle, wake up!"

The outspoken words sounded like thunder in the room. Calvert squirmed on the bed. He frowned in his disturbed sleep.

"Wake up, you fool!" shouted Philip. He gave the bed a vicious kick with his foot.

Spluttering, dazed, Calvert opened his eyes and glared about the room. When he saw Philip he blinked convulsively.

"Wh—what?"

Philip broke into a laugh.

"Having a nightmare, Uncle? . . . No? You will now. Watch!"

Turning his back upon the invalid, Philip stood on tiptoe and reached to the hood of the clock. Heedless of his uncle's startled cry he pried open the glass, turned it back, and with the thumb and forefinger of his right hand he grasped the two hands of the clock and squeezed them together. Then, leering over his shoulder, he began ruthlessly to twist the hands loose.

For a stunned moment Calvert was speechless. His face went ghastly white. His eyes stared incredulously, fearfully, stupidly.

Finally, as the realization of this brutal

deed struck his senses, he managed a hoarse cry:

"Philip! *Philip*——"

He made a desperate attempt to grab Philip's arm, but his strength failed him; he crumpled up on the bed with a gasp of anguish. Philip could hear the shuddering convulsion of his heart.

"Look, Uncle!" he cried. With a final tug he tore the hands from the face of the clock. "Look!" he shouted. He thrust the twisted bits of metal into Calvert's face.

It was a grandiose gesture, and futile. That disease-weakened heart had constricted and stopped. Calvert was dead. He lay motionless on the bed, his face contorted and stiff, his eyes staring out like balls of glass.

There was a long moment of silence as Philip looked down at him; and then, abortively, hollowly, the grandfather clock struck the hour of twelve.

2

IT WAS heart-disease, of course. The doctor had long ago warned Philip that any shock to his uncle might prove fatal. And so it had. There was certainly no question of foul play; Philip had been grossly careless in destroying the clock in such a cruel manner, but . . .

That was precisely how the doctor viewed the event. To him it was a closed case, and if he had any suspicions of Philip's motives he kept them scrupulously to himself. The old man was dead of a natural cause. His nephew had come into the Calvert millions. That was all.

A few days later, attended by friends and his one remaining relative, Calvert was entombed with all proper solemnity and respect.

Philip was amused by the rumors that spread about regarding the Calvert "covenant." There was a childish naïveté in other people's awe of the supernatural that appealed to his sense of superiority. But he disdained the rumors and passed them off as unimportant, time-wasting gossip. Still, he was anxious for the talk to die out; recurrent anecdotes of the Calvert superstition irritated him.

He was less amused to read, in a national weekly, this succinct comment:

"Coincidence. In Manhattan last week lay at death's door Anthony Calvert, famed septuagenarian and financier. Boasting he would not die excepting upon the stroke of twelve, he amazed doctors by clinging to life long after they gave him up. Finally, in an attack of angina, his heart stopped beating: time, exactly midnight. Remarked his nephew skeptically, 'Odd Coincidence'."

There were a few letters from his uncle's friends remarking upon the unexplainable nature of the death, and one letter—from the Calverts' minister—expatiated didactically and at length on the mysterious ways of the Almighty. Philip was irritated by all this attention. He resolved, with that stoic restraint which had marked him in the past, to ignore all these hints and regard his uncle's passing as an act of the most ordinary kind.

It was not easy. There were papers to sign and inventories to take; lawyers bothered him daily; brokers called to go over his uncle's papers; art collectors, anxious to take advantage of Philip's indifference to the Calvert Gallery, plagued him continually. All things conspired to remind him of his uncle's death.

Philip had decided to renovate and modernize the old Calvert house on Seventy-third Street. Among other things which were destined to reach the auctioneer's block was the grandfather clock. It was still a workable piece; with new hands and a re-winding of its weights it would tell time accurately enough. Philip thought that the price brought by the clock ought to pay for his uncle's granite tombstone.

But before he could arrange the sale of

these archaic things the afore-mentioned publicity descended upon him like an avalanche, and he thought it better to wait a respectful interval before molesting his uncle's cherished property. It would "look" better.

So the clock remained beside his uncle's bed, quiet and handless, like a sentient being brooding in the darkness of the room. Philip never went near it. His own rooms, on the first floor, were spacious enough to provide him with all the privacy which he required, and he had his own glass-and-chromium electric clock. To all outward appearances he had preserved his uncle's room intact out of a deep feeling of Christian reverence.

The doctor ceased paying his calls, the embalmers were paid and complimented, and Philip, truly for the first time, began to realize the convenience of his uncle's passing. The house was his own now, to do with as he pleased. The money was his, and the cars, the servants, the yacht. Yet despite his new freedom he could not help but feel shackled to his uncle's memory by an invisible bond which he could not sever.

He decided, once again, to get rid of the clock. Its grim, watchful vigil over the empty bed had become a ghost to him: he felt his uncle's dying scrutiny peering from behind its face. It was a constant reminder that Philip had—in the severest sense of the word—murdered his uncle.

And then—suddenly one night—the clock came to astonishing life.

IT WAS just one week after the funeral. The storm was at its height. Philip had been unable to sleep and was roaming about downstairs with a cigarette in his mouth and a highball in his hand. The house was oppressively silent, save for the noises of the wind outside. It was hot too; he perspired freely. He paced restlessly from room to room, his mind distracted by the fragments of a nightmare which he had suffered a few hours before.

It was just about midnight when he heard the servant on the stairs. For a long while he had been suspecting that the man was spying upon him, and he swung into the hall angrily, prepared to fire him then and there. But the servant's ashen, fearful face silenced him.

"Do you hear it too, sir?" the man asked, his eyes bulging. "I couldn't sleep. I thought if I got a—a glass of milk——"

"Hear *what?*" demanded Philip sharply. "What's the matter with you? You're white as a sheet."

"Those sounds, sir . . . from your uncle's room."

"Sounds?" Philip's hand constricted about the highball glass. He put one slipper-shod foot on the stair. "What the devil are you raving about? I hear nothing."

The servant swallowed uneasily.

"I couldn't be mistaken, sir. I—I've heard it for the past few nights. A kind of scratching noise, sir."

"All right! All right! Go out and get your milk." Philip waved him abruptly aside. "I'll tend to this myself!" He brushed past the servant and rapidly climbed the stairs.

He heard the sound before he reached his uncle's room at the end of the hall. He stopped, gripped the baluster. From down the darkened corridor, dimly from behind the closed door, came the dull sound which the butler had heard. It was a scratching sound. It reminded Philip of a sharp long fingernail scraping on wood. With this vision before his eyes he snatched at the drawstrings of his robe and proceeded ahead.

He snapped on the hall light with a contemptuous brush of his hand. It was probably a branch from one of the trees sweeping against the room; nothing more unnatural than that, surely. He reached his

uncle's room, opened the door, and turned on the floor-lamp.

The stale odor of medicine and human habitation greeted him with sickening familiarity. He winced, strode to the window and swept aside the heavy curtains. Out in that frosty blackness he could see no disturbing twig. . . .

He turned around and stared about the room. The noise, louder now, came unmistakably from within these four walls. Philip glared defiantly, tracking the sound to its source. He discovered it at last, and his stern face underwent a sudden, frozen whiteness. The sound came from within the old clock!

Actually the clock had stopped running on the night his uncle had died; it was not running now—but something, in its mahogany case, was writhing to get free.

It was an impatient sound, animal-like in its vigor. An entombed rat probably, thought Philip. The old house was infested with them.

The inner compartment of the clock could be reached by means of a small rectangular door, but the door was locked, and the key had been lost for years. Philip studied the door with a frown. It was flush with the clock casing, difficult to pry open.

He tried it experimentally, breaking off a fingernail. The scratching sound inside grew quiet.

Philip was not a superstitious man. Nothing mattered to him but the dictates of his own pleasure, and he was contemptuous of myths and fables. A less imaginative man might have discovered a disturbing analogy in the fact that those sounds resembled the sounds of scratching *hands*. . . .

"It's a rat," he decided, "and if the damned thing wants to gnaw the clock to shreds it's all right with me!"

He went back downstairs and left his uncle's room to blackness. The servant, cowering beside the newel post, watched him fearfully.

"It's a rat, you fool!" Philip snarled. "Now get back to bed and stop prowling around. And," he added thoughtfully, "if I hear one word about this house being haunted I'll sack the whole lot of you!"

"Y-yes, sir." The butler was not very convincing. He swallowed his phlegm and climbed the stairs to his own room in the attic.

Philip mixed himself another drink and sat down in a comfortable chair to give it his full attention. This was difficult to do. From where he sat he could hear the sounds from his uncle's room; the sharp, incessant scratching, the gnawing and clawing of something entombed within those ancient panels of the clock. They were distracting sounds; but no doubt the rat would gnaw its way out before morning and that would be the end of it.

But when morning came the sounds continued. All day long they continued, driving Philip slowly but surely to anxiety, fear, and eventual madness. They endured throughout the night, went on during the next day, and became louder and more frenzied as evening wore on again.

PHILIP tried hard not to admit to himself that the sounds grated on his nerves, but he had been drinking so steadily of late that he fell into brooding introspection; his fingers twitched, his eyes played deceiving tricks on him, his brain magnified, distorted, symbolized those damnable sounds. . . .

And so, one night, he did something which he should have done sooner: he opened the compartment of the old clock and let the imprisoned rat come out.

He laughed hysterically when he saw it scamper down the inside of the clock and leap through the opening. So it was a rat! But of course it was! What else *could* it have been?

Drunk with relief, he knelt down beside the open compartment and struck a match, the better to study the interior. It was a large compartment. The pendulum hung down still and lifeless from the blackness above. The lower of the two weights—heavy, ponderous things for such a tall clock—was suspended less than a foot off the flooring. The higher weight was drawn so high up in the clock that it did not bother him. He pushed the pendulum and lower weight gently aside as he lowered the match into the clock's depths.

Heavy, sweet odors stung his nostrils—sickening odors of ancient, worm-rotted, seasoned wood. Philip's head, already swimming from spirits, began to throb. The match fell from his trembling fingers. Vertigo assailed him. Feeling himself becoming suddenly dizzy, he grasped hold of the lower weight-rope for support.

Something snapped and broke in the darkness above him. He hardly had time to lift his head. He heard a scuttling, hissing sound, and then something huge and heavy crashed into his uplifted forehead with the force of a sledge.

A few hours later—just at midnight—he died in a hospital bed without having regained consciousness, his skull broken, his brain pierced with bits of bone, from the blow of the second clock-weight whose rope had been weakened by the insistent, uninterrupted gnawing of a rat. . . .

The Howler

By H. P. LOVECRAFT

They told me not to take the Briggs Hill path
That used to be the highroad through to Zoar,
For Goody Watkins, hanged in seventy-four,
Had left a certain monstrous aftermath.
Yet when I disobeyed and had in view
The vine-hung cottage by the great rock slope,
I could not think of elms or hempen rope,
But wondered why the house still seemed so new.

Stopping awhile to watch the fading day,
I heard faint howls as from a room upstairs,
When through the ivied panes one sunset ray
Struck in, and caught the howler unawares.
I glimpsed—and ran in frenzy from the place
And from the four-pawed thing with human face.

"Stephanola!" he murmured, and his lips formed a kiss.

Mansions in the Sky

By SEABURY QUINN

A tale of Jules de Grandin, the mercurial and fascinating little French scientist, occult detective, ghost-breaker and expert in things supernatural

"*VRAIMENT*," Jules de Grandin looked up from his reading, parentheses of concentration between his brows. "It is precisely as he says, that Monsieur Kipling."

"Eh?" I answered, stifling an incipient yawn. It was raining, steadily and coldly, and had been since midafternoon. An icy wind soughed through the bare gray trees, and flocks of sparrows huddled shivering

in the shelter of the dripping eaves. The study fire was dying, and I was almost waterlogged with sleepiness. "What's true?" I murmured with scant interest.

"Why, this epigram he makes, my friend:

"'The sins ye do by two and two
Must be paid for one by one.'"

"I dare say," I returned, "but if you don't mind, I think that I'll turn in."

The phone bell rang a short, sharp stuttering warning, first querulously, then insistently, finally with a frantic, drilling clamor. I half decided to ignore it; the night was foul, and I was dog-tired after a long, trying day. But habit overcame my inclination. "Hullo?" I challenged gruffly as I took the instrument from its cradle.

"Doctor Trowbridge, will you come right away, please? It is my niece. She has hurt herself; perhaps she may be dead already——"

"Hold on," I cut in, "who is this?"

"Kimon Sainpolis, Doctor. It is my niece Stephanola. She is badly hurt."

"What's the nature of the injury," I began, but the sharp click of the phone thrust back into its hooks broke my query off half uttered, and I turned toward the surgery for my first-aid kit with a sigh of exasperation.

De Grandin joined me at the front door, his trench coat belted and his felt hat already turned down in anticipation of the outside rain.

"Where to, *mon vieux?*" he asked. "May not I go, also? It is dull work, staying by oneself when others are about their business."

"Of course, glad to have you," I responded as I climbed into my car and shot the starter. "Kimon Sainpolis, the Greek importer, just called. It seems his niece has met some sort of accident—pretty serious, too, I gathered, for he said she might be dead."

We turned into the boulevard and headed toward the heights where Sainpolis, grown rich with vending wine in Prohibition days, and richer still since his activities were legalized, had built his big stone mansion.

THE wind was bitter as a witch's curse as we began to mount the hill, and by the time we reached our destination there was a glaze of ice across my windshield reminiscent of the frosting on old-fashioned barroom mirrors. It was almost midnight, but every window in the house was bright as we drew up at the curb and hastened up the path of marble tiles that led to the wide porch.

Inside there was the sound of voices speaking in the stage-whisper of ill-suppressed excitement as the butler met us at the door and ushered us across the hall. Somewhere upstairs a woman laughed and wept by turns in the shrill timbre of hysteria.

"Doctor Trowbridge, this is kind of you, indeed," Sainpolis exclaimed as he rushed down the wide stairs to greet us. "I am almost frantic—Doctor de Grandin!" he acknowledged my introduction with a deep bow, "I am honored that you, the great occultist, have consented to come out with Doctor Trowbridge! My niece——"

"Where is she?" I broke in sharply. Our patient might be dying while we stood there talking.

"Upstairs, sir. She is—oh, but it is terrible! How shall I ever face my brother, her poor father? He sent her to me from the old country when she was only three years old. Now——" He wrung his slender white hands in an agony of despair. "You will help me keep it secret, Doctor?"

"Where is she?" I repeated. "And what's wrong with her?"

"Ah, yes, of course, Doctor. You must know all—all—if you are to help me. Come."

Up the thickly carpeted steps we followed him, down a hallway wide enough to have served a hotel, till we paused before a partly-opened door.

"In there!" he whispered as he stood aside and waved dramatically. "You will find her in there, gentlemen."

De Grandin was before me by the fraction of a step, and as he crossed the threshold he came to a sharp halt, letting his breath out in a low *"Ha?"*

Before an ormolu-framed cheval glass, like a *couturière's* dummy overturned, a girl lay on the slate-gray carpet. The sheer rose chiffon of her evening dress was crumpled round her like the petals of a wilting flower, pale yellow hair like wind-blown floss swirled round her face, a silver brocade evening sandal had slipped off one silk-sheathed foot and lay gaping emptily upon its side.

All this I saw at first glance. My second look showed what de Grandin had seen at first.

Below the golden head, where it rested on the velvet carpet, was a sickening dark-red stain, slowly spreading as the gilt clock on the dressing-table ticked the seconds away nervously.

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed. "Suicide!"

"Quite yes," de Grandin nodded. "It was not us, but the funeral director and the coroner Monsieur Sainpolis should have called."

"But we musn't have the coroner!" our host wailed from the doorway. "I appeal to you as doctors to prevent a scandal. I have called you to attend my niece. If she is dead, you can certify——"

"Be quiet, if you please," de Grandin ordered sharply. "Not one word from you! Answer me: When did this happen?"

"Not fifteen minutes ago," Sainpolis answered. "We had been to the theatre, Madame Sainpolis, my niece and I. Stephanola had been nervous and upset all afternoon; during the final intermission she complained of feeling faint and begged us to allow her to come home. We let her go, but before she had been gone five minutes we decided to follow her. Our car drove up just as she dismissed her taxi, and we entered the house not two minutes behind her. We heard her slam her door; before we could get halfway up the stairs we heard a shot. See"—he pointed to the tiny pistol lying by her outstretched hand—"it was with that she did it."

De Grandin eyed him levelly. "You can assign no reason for this so unfortunate occurrence?"

Sainpolis raised his shoulders in a shrug of eloquent negation. "You know as much as I do, sir. My niece was only twenty-two and was affianced to an estimable young man. As far as I know they had no quarrel."

"U'm?" de Grandin tweaked his small mustache. "She had shown no signs of melancholy—what of this afternoon?"

Sainpolis looked thoughtful. "I could not call it melancholy," he replied at length, "but she has certainly been nervous at times. Six months or so ago she lost a pair of gloves. They were practically new, and quite expensive, but it seemed to me she brooded over their loss far more than she should. It was certainly not natural."

Abruptly he returned to his original theme: "You will help me, gentlemen? You can say it was not suicide—I will say she hurt herself while playing with the toy pistol, and that I summoned you in all haste; you can bear me out in your statements. The disgrace of a suicide in the family will practically ruin me — my brother will declare a feud on me—she will be denied the last rites of the church——"

De Grandin motioned him to silence. "If you are troubled only on those scores, *Monsieur,* we can certainly assist you," he answered. "*Mademoiselle* your niece was

rendered melancholy by the loss of her so pretty gloves; she brooded on their loss; *alors,* she shot herself. *Voilà.* Sane people do not do such things, and the church will not refuse its comfort to a person who has killed herself while mad. We can give you our opinion that she must have been of unsound mind when she destroyed herself. Do not make yourself uneasy on that account, *Monsieur.*"

"But the police," Sainpolis almost wailed. "They will spread the news broadcast——"

"Excuse me, sir," the butler paused discreetly at the entrance, eyes carefully averted from what lay on the floor, "there's a gentleman from the police here asking for Miss Stephanola. I've told him she is indisposed——"

I had not thought Sainpolis' face could have been paler than it was already, but at the serving-man's announcement the blood seemed visibly to drain out of his countenance, leaving it as livid as the features of a long-dead corpse. "The—police?" he choked. "Tell them to go away, tell them anything. They must not know; we cannot see them now——"

"*Pardonnez-moi, Monsieur,* there you do make the great mistake," de Grandin interrupted. "A crime has been committed here, the crime of suicide. The police must be notified. Await me, and touch nothing in this room!" Tiptoeing down the corridor he leaned across the marble balustrade and looked down to the lower hall.

Below us stood a big red-headed man, looking interestedly, but not at all with awe, at the articles of almost priceless vertu with which Sainpolis had adorned his house. As he turned we saw his face, smooth-shaven, florid, curiously calm.

"*Gloire!*" de Grandin exclaimed delightedly. "We are in luck, it is the good Costello. *Holà, mon vieux!*"

The big detective started at the little Frenchman's hail, and, "Glory be, Doctor de Grandin, sor, who'd 'a' thought to find you here?" he answered with an eye-crinkling smile. "It's on th' level, then, about th' lady's bein' laid up?"

"*Hélas, mon brave,* it is more serious than that," de Grandin replied. "We were called in haste to tend her, but a greater one than we arrived before us."

"Arra, sor, ye mane she's dead?"

"Completely."

"What wuz it, sor?"

"It seems to have been suicide by gunshot."

The utterly expressionless expression which policemen, undertakers and lawyers can assume at will spread across Costello's face.

"Does it, now, indade?" he answered. "That's that, then. We'd best be lookin' round a bit before th' coroner's men mess everything up wid their chicken-tracks."

"You will leave us, if you please, *Monsieur,*" de Grandin ordered Sainpolis as we re-entered the death chamber. "There are certain observations to be made which might distress you."

As the worried little man crept out he bent above the body. The pistol lying on the floor was little larger than a toy, and as nearly as I could determine was of .22 caliber. When de Grandin held it to me after a quick inspection I followed his example and put the muzzle to my nose. Faint, but quite perceptible, the sulfurous reek of burnt gunpowder came to me.

That the weapon had been held against the girl's head there was no doubt, for the wound disfiguring the scalp had been torn into a cross-shaped scar by escaping gases plowing up the tissue, and the skin each side of the aperture was tattooed in converging lines like wheel-spokes by dark powder-stains. An area of slightly burned flesh ringed the hole, and a disk of powder-blackening half an inch or so in diameter marred the skin. From the irregularity of

the wound it was evident that the bullet had crashed through the temporal bone at the junction of the coronal and squamous sutures, and had been directed upward to the brain.

"Bien," de Grandin nodded. "All indicia of self-destruction are apparent. Now, if the fingerprints upon the pistol are the poor young person's——"

"Yis, sor," Costello broke in with what seemed to me unnecessary emphasis, "I'm particu'ly anxious to git a sample o' her fingerprints."

"Mais, c'est très simple," answered de Grandin as he lit a wax match, let its oily flame discolor the smooth surface of a hand mirror and, one after another, proceeded to rub lampblack on the dead girl's well-manicured finger-tips, then transfer impressions to a sheet of paper from a memorandum pad which lay upon the rosewood writing-desk.

"You are satisfied it was a suicide, *mon sergent?"* he asked as he completed his task.

"It seems so, sor," Costello answered, "but——"

"Yes—but?" de Grandin prompted.

"Oh, nothin', sor. I wuz just wonderin' how she got hep."

"She which?" the Frenchman asked. "This 'hep', what is he, if you please?" but before the sergeant could reply, *"Ohé, la pauvre!"*

"What's that, sor?"

"Observe." He motioned toward the far side of the room where a *prie-dieu* stood against the wall, a shelf containing two extinguished candles, a covered crucifix and a rosary fastened to the wall above it. *"Cette pauvre,"* he repeated. "See, she veiled the cross before she shot herself all dead!" Stepping across the room he bowed formally to the cross and lifted off the tulle scarf which obscured it. *"Parbleu,* this is a most unusual-looking prayer book," he added as he bent and picked a slender volume bound in gold-stamped vellum from the velvet cushions of the prayer-bench.

"Regard him, if you please," he ordered, holding out the little book for our inspection.

We saw its covers were secured by a gold clasp held by a tiny padlock.

"Hey, sor, ye can't do that widout a search warrant!" Costello warned sharply.

"No? You amaze me, my friend." From his hip, where he wore it lashed to his back brace-straps—*"pour les circonstances imprévues"*—de Grandin drew his double-edged *apache* knife and calmly forced the book's lock. It gave way with a snap, revealing not a volume of devotions, but a blank book whose pages were thickly covered with a fine, irregular script.

"French!" exclaimed Costello in disgust as he glanced at the small writing. "A lotta good that'll do me."

"It may," de Grandin replied with a grin. "There have been times when I believed I understood that language. Perhaps I can translate it for you." He thrust the volume in his pocket, and:

"Ye can't do that, sor," protested the detective. "It's agin th' law."

"So in an unhappier day was bootlegging but I have the recollection no one ever stopped to think about it," answered the small Frenchman. "Luckily I am under no compulsion to observe the niceties of police etiquette, and undoubtlessly this small book will prove of help to us. Permit me to suggest you look out of the window for a moment, my friend. The view tonight is very fine."

Astonishingly, as the big detective turned his back upon him, he dropped upon his knees beside the crumpled little body, joined his hands and bowed his head in silent prayer a moment.

"Eh bien," he rose and brushed his trouser knees, "let us be upon our way, my friends. It seems we have accomplished all we can here. We are agreed it was a

suicide? *Très bon.* Let us notify the coroner to that effect."

"AND now, my old one, tell me what this 'hep' is," he demanded of Costello as we gathered round the study fire. "You have the idea how the poor young *demoiselle* contracted it?"

Costello grinned. "Sure, sor, it ain't a thing, it's sumpin that ye feel. Like"—his eyes roved round the room in search of inspiration—"well, sor, ye're hep when ye're jerry—like as if a felly tried to snatch yer overcoat in a restaurant, an' ye realized what it wuz that he wuz up to as he started to do it."

The frown of fierce fixed concentration faded from de Grandin's face. "One comprehends entirely, *mon vieux.* When one is hep he has become wise, *n' est-ce-pas?*"

"Sure, now, sor, ye wouldn't 'a' been kiddin' me?" Costello asked reproachfully.

"By no means, my incomparable one. But what was it that the so unfortunate young woman had become hep to?"

Once more Costello looked serious. "I ain't sayin' she destroyed herself on this account, but it's worth considerin'," he replied, reaching in his pocket and drawing forth a slip of folded paper. "This come by special delivery to Headquarters about ten o'clock, an' I'd come out to ask th' pore young gur-rl about it when I finds she's up an' shot herself."

The paper was a noncommittal sheet of cheap white bond such as can be had at any ten cent store, and the message which it bore was composed of words and letters cut from a newspaper, capitals and lowercase characters oddly assorted:

"if you waNt to DIshcover who made the burglaries in THIS city YOu should looK at stePhanolA SainpOlis fingERprintS"

That was all.

Costello cleared his throat. "We ain't exactly advertisin' it, sor, but these burglaries that's been committed here th' past six months has been done mighty slick, an' we haven't got to first base wid 'em. It a'most seems as if th' felly that's pulled 'em has gone out of his way to leave his fingerprints around. A'most like he signs his jobs, ye might say. Three-four times we've made a pinch, an' it looked as if we had dead wood on 'em, but when we come to matchin' up th' fingerprints th' whole case melted."

"You could not identify the culprits' prints left at the scene of crime?"

"No, sor, that we couldn't. There ain't no record of 'em here or in th' criminal or non-criminal files in New York an' Washin'ton."

"You have a copy of the miscreant's prints with you?"

"Right here, sor." The sergeant drew a second slip of paper from his wallet and laid it on the table.

Glass in hand, he and de Grandin compared the copy with the set of prints made of the dead girl's digits. Even I, who am no expert, could read the damning likeness as I compared them through the lens. The wanted criminal's fingerprints and those of Stephanola Sainpolis were identical.

"Bates hell, sors, don't it?" asked Costello. "Here's a young gur-rl, rich and well brought up an' wid no nade to want fer annything longer than it takes to ask fer it; yet off she goes an' takes to burglary. One o' them fool thrill-hunters, she wuz, I'd say, an' just to make th' game more dang'rous she went an' left her fingerprints all over every job she pulled."

He returned the papers to his pocket, and: "Wonder who it wuz that tipped us off, an' why?" he added thoughtfully. "Belike she had a partner in th' wur-rk, some uneddycated crook who got mad at her when she wouldn't come across wid more swag, an' double-crossed her for revenge."

"I think you're wrong there, Sergeant,"

I told him. Ever since I'd seen the treacherous message I'd been wrestling with memory, and recollection came to me just as he finished speaking. "When I was a youngster serving my internship at old Bascomb Hospital I used to see notes sent the clinic by our foreign out-patients. Part of my work was translating them into English for the records and I remember how our English sibilants confused them. You'll note the sender of this note says 'dishcover' for 'discover.' Our English 'sh' and 'ch' and the combinations of our sibilants 'c,' 'z' and 's' are things few foreigners except the Scandinavians and Dutch ever seem able to grasp unless they've had more than ordinary training in English orthography. They'll use 'sh' for the combination of 'c' and 's,' or 's' and 'c'—as in 'discover'—eight times out of twelve. I believe whoever pasted up this note was foreign born and quite unused to writing English. He may speak it fairly well, but when it comes to writing it he's virtually illiterate."

"*Parbleu,* my friend, you put the finger squarely on it!" de Grandin exclaimed. "Me, I made those very mistakes which you point out when I was studying English. The girl has slipped from Friend Costello's net by suicide, but he may be able to arrest the one who betrayed her, thus meting out poetical and criminal justice at the same time. Tomorrow I will translate her diary," he added to Costello. "It may be we shall find some clue in it."

HE WAS in the library most of the next day, and when he joined me at dinner there was an oddly sad expression on his face.

"Find anything in the diary?" I asked.

"Much; a great deal," he replied with something like a sigh, "but I must ask your indulgence. Wait until the good Costello joins us, so we need have only one narration of the story."

Police routine delayed Costello until after nine o'clock, and several times I thought de Grandin would explode with impatience. Within two minutes after we had gathered in the study he stood before us like a teacher about to address his class, the dead girl's diary in one hand, a sheaf of notes clutched in the other.

"My friends," he began impressively, "we three owe a humble apology to the dead. All of us condemned her as a criminal who chose suicide as an escape from justice last night. It was not so. She was the victim of a villain blacker than the devil's lowest coal-vault. Attend me. Here is the story which her journal tells:

"Two years ago, when she was only twenty, she was attending school near Morristown. A fashionable school it was, one where the pupils were continually chaperoned, except when they were most in need of supervision. It seems the girls had found a way of getting out unseen at night and going to the near-by city, almost at will. *Eh bien,* I think the managers of that school took more trouble to investigate their pupils' families' bank accounts than they did to look up their background, for assuredly they had some queer fish there. One of them was a girl whom the diary designates as Amy, and it was she whom the poor young Mademoiselle Sainpolis shared rooms with. *Tiens,* she shared other things as well, for anon this Amy took her to a roadhouse near the school, and there they met a man called Niccolo—last name unknown.

"He had a way with women, this one. A handsome dog he must be, and a vain and vicious one.

"This poor one thought that she was seeing life when she met him; even when she learned he was a criminal she was more thrilled than shocked, and when he dared her to take cocain she was still more fascinated. *Tenez,* the path down to Avernus is a smooth one. Within two months she

had joined him in a criminal foray, acting as his lookout while he burglarized a house.

"In her journal she recounts how she suffered with remorse next day, and vowed to have no more to do with him. Within a week she kept another rendezvous, and this time they held up a dining-car.

"Then fear came to the aid of conscience. The papers told of the blond girl who helped the highwayman, and she was sure she would be recognized if she remained near Morristown. She wrote her uncle, begged to be allowed to come home, and left the school next day.

"Earnestly she strove to make amends for her misdeeds. Every day she went to church, each night she prayed for hours for forgiveness. It seemed her prayers were answered, for in a short time she met a young man named Strapoli, and their love was almost instantaneous. They were affianced, preparations for their wedding were in progress, then"—he paused and waved his hand as if announcing an arrival—"Niccolo re-entered. She, as she thought, was done with him, but he had not by any means concluded his relationship with her. Oh, no.

"She was beautiful, she was wealthy, she was much to be desired. He meant to have her. *Ha,* but he was subtle, that one!

"He called her on the telephone, and she, poor innocent, went in mortal fear to the appointed place. She offered him whatever he desired if only he would leave her, and he reproached her for her lack of faith, told her he knew they lived in different worlds, and all he wanted was to say goodbye and beg some little keepsake from her. What do you think he asked for a souvenir, *hein?*"

Pausing, he looked expectantly from me to Costello; then, as we made no answer: "Her gloves, by damn, he asked her gloves of her! You comprehend?"

"I recall Sainpolis said she'd lost a pair of gloves six months or so ago, but I don't see the connection," I answered. "She knew where they were——"

"*Précisément.* That is exactly why she was driven first to desperation, then to madness, finally to self-destruction. The gloves were glacé kid, and almost new, she says so in her diary. She gave them to him gladly, and came home with a great fear gone from her; but in a few days all her dreams of happiness were dissolved. Why did he ask her gloves? I ask you."

Vaguely recollection knocked upon the door of my memory. "Didn't Portia and Nerissa beg Bassanio's and Gratiano's gloves after the trial in *The Merchant of Venice* in order to plague them later on?" I asked.

"*Tu parles, mon vieux.* But what they did in sport this one did in deadly earnest. From the gloves he had matrices of her fingerprints made, and these he had cemented to the fingertips of rubber gloves——"

"Be gorry, sor, I git it!" Costello almost roared. "That's why th' burglar wuz so careless wid his fingerprints—that's why we couldn't match 'em up, no matter how we tried——"

"*Exactement.* And this Niccolo, this reptile, this snake in human guise, wrote to his victim, telling her each time he projected a burglary and informing her that her fingerprints would be found at the scene of crime.

"Imagine yourselves that! She scanned the papers every day to learn if any clue had been discovered. Nothing; nowhere; never! All the papers told her that the burglar left his fingerprints, but his identity——"

"Well, for goodness' sake, why didn't she denounce him?" I interjected. "She could have told the police that her fingerprints were forged——"

He threw me a God-give-me-patience look. "Quite yes, but if he were apprehended her adventures into crime would

have come to light, also. Remember that, my friend. Only in his safety lay her own. Also, she was much in love with Monsieur Strapoli, and stood in mortal fear of scandal. She dared not speak, yet if she remained quiet she was still in danger. *Misère de Dieu,* how she must have suffered!

"For six months this went on, six months she lived and moved beneath the shadow of this Damocletian sword; for half a year she roasted in a hell of fear, grilled on the iron of her conscience. Then came the last blow to her shattered morale.

"Not content with having made a criminal of her, not satisfied with having introduced her to the habit of cocain, this species of a camel must make a final demand. She must, he told her, dismiss the young Strapoli and accept him as her fiancé. He would have her beauty and her wealth at once and live in idleness upon the fortune which she brought him.

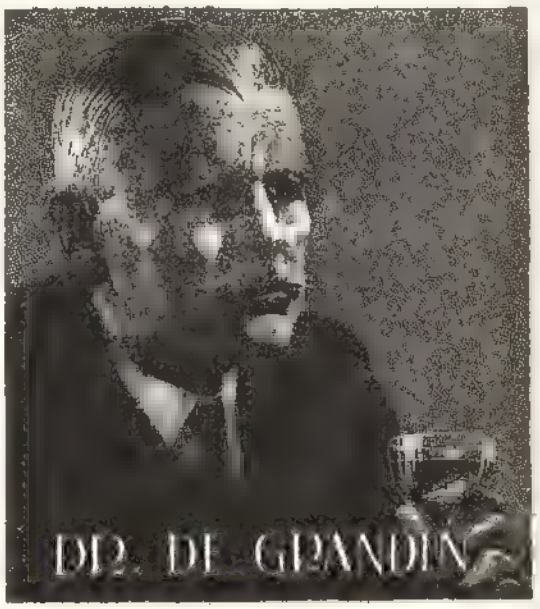
"She might have given him the money, but herself she denied him, and he took revenge. Only yesterday he notified her that unless she married him forthwith he would denounce her to the police.

"Last night she and her aunt and uncle went to the theatre, to a play called *Evil Communications.* It is a melodrama dealing with a blackmail plot. In it the heroine who has forsaken her criminal associates and married happily is about to be denounced by one with whom she has been involved in crime. She sees her happiness about to be destroyed, her children branded with her hidden infamy. She kills herself. The suggestion took hold on Mademoiselle Sainpolis. She left the theatre, left her aunt and uncle, hurried home and—*tiens,* the rest we know. We came, the good Costello came; but she had gone."

"Bedad," commented Costello, "I'd like to have 'bout fifteen minutes private conversation wid this Niccolo. Me an' a two-foot length o' rubber hose."

SHE was very lovely in her casket. The scars of autopsy had been obliterated by the skill of the embalmers, a gown of white lace—fashioned for her wedding day—enfolded her slim form, a white lace mantilla draped her shining hair; in the slender, oleander-white hands crossed piously upon her virgin bosom a rosary was twined. Our testimony had convinced the priest, and her funeral was held in church with the lovely, long-drawn ceremony of high mass as celebrated by the Greek communion, a choir of forty voices singing *a cappella* and incense rising in an almost choking cloud of sweetness. Six young girls robed in white and veiled like brides were pallbearers; floral offerings filled two open touring-cars which headed the procession from St. Helena's to the tiny Greek Orthodox cemetery.

"MISTER STRAPOLI, if ye plaze, sors," announced Nora McGinnis shortly after dinner the evening following the funeral. "He says as how he ain't a patient," she added rather grimly, for the rule against admitting patients after office



hours was of her own devising, and one which she imposed on both my clientele and me with rigorous inflexibility.

The young man who came in a moment later was typical of the city's café life. His dinner suit was of exaggerated cut, trousers fitted snugly at the waist and hips but bellowing into flowing bottoms at the foot; a purple grosgrain cummerbund was bound so tightly round his waist as to suggest a corset, his double-breasted jacket sloped sharply from the shoulders to the waist, then flared above the hips. Black hair, rather long, was brushed straight back without a part and trained down on his cheeks in long sideburns. The bandoline with which it was dressed gave it a finish flat and shiny as a skullcap of black patent leather. He was the perfect "sheik" type, reminiscent of the days when Valentino and Novarro were the *beaux idéals* of motion picture lovers. He was lithe and graceful as a panther in his movements, but somehow the impression which he gave was of a panther which has been hunted till the fear of hounds and guns is in its sleek pelt like a barb.

"Doctor de Grandin?" he asked tentatively in a light but musical voice.

"I am he," de Grandin answered, eyeing him with none too much approval. "What is it that you wish?"

"I am Anthony Strapoli. Stephanola Sainpolis was—we were to have been married."

The little Frenchman shot me a quick glance as if to warn me, "Silence, my friend, tell him nothing. Let me handle this." To the young man:

"You have our deepest sympathy, *Monsieur.* I, who have had the experience, know how the heart bleeds at the thought that we shall not see those we love again——"

"But I have seen her, sir. I saw her last night. That's why I've come to you. They tell me you know all about such things."

De Grandin's narrow brows rose slightly. "You imply you saw her in the spirit?"

"No, sir. In the flesh. I swear it!"

For an instant the small Frenchman eyed him narrowly; then: "Say on, *Monsieur,* I listen."

The young man dropped into a chair and fixed his large dark eyes upon de Grandin's small blue ones. "It wasn't any ghost or spirit I saw, sir," he announced earnestly. "It was Stephanola, in the very body I have known and loved.

"I lead the band at Casa Ayer, and last night was a special occasion, our first broadcast on a national hook-up, so I couldn't be away, though it almost broke my heart to go through with it. I played at both the dinner and the supper shows, and it was two o'clock before we were through, almost three when I reached home. I was so tired that I could hardly stand, but when I went to bed I couldn't sleep; so, sometime between three and four I got up and went to the bathroom for a dose of veronal. I took a stiff shot and was going back to bed when I happened to look into the living-room. Something white was shining there."

"Shining, *Monsieur?*" de Grandin repeated in a flat voice.

"Yes, sir. At first I thought it was the moonlight on the polished floor, but when I looked again I saw it was the lower part of a white dress, a woman's long white gown. I stepped into the room, and there was Stephanola. Don't look at me like that, sir. I tell you she was there!"

"But certainly," de Grandin soothed. "Conditions were ideal for the vision. The broken heart, the tired, frayed nerves, the sedative——"

"It wasn't any vision, as you call it. It was my girl, there in the living, breathing flesh. She stood there in her bridal gown, the one they used to bury her, with the white lace veil across her golden hair, just as I'd hoped to see her at the altar.

"At first I was afraid. Everyone's afraid of ghosts, even if they're of the ones they've loved; so I began to cross myself, and said, 'In the name of the Father, and of the Son——'

"But before I finished she put her hand out to me. 'Don't say it, Tony,' she begged. 'If you do I'll have to go away, and I don't want to leave you so soon.'

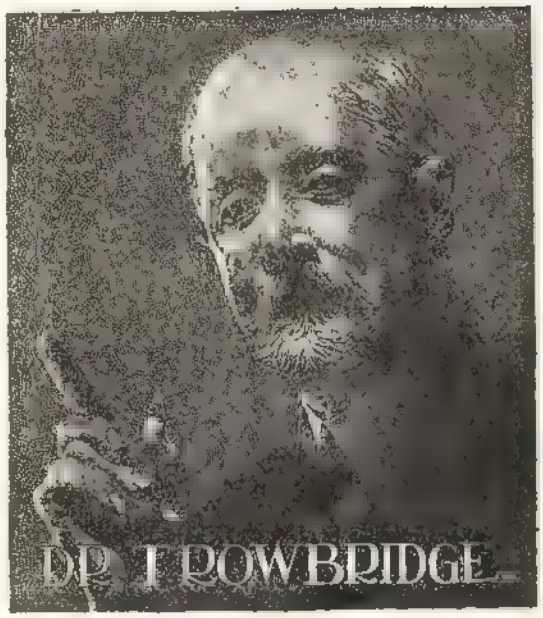
"So there I stopped with my hand in the air, right where I'd touched myself upon the forehead when I began to form the cross, and the invocation half pronounced.

"She stepped toward me, and I saw the motion of her train against the floor, and when the moonlight shone on her she cast a shadow. Ghosts don't make shadows, so I began to lose my dread of her, and when she put her hand on mine it was cool and soft, just as it always was, not cold and ghostly.

" 'Tony dear,' she whispered, and I could feel her breath against my cheek, 'you've got to help me. I need your help most dreadfully, my dear. I'm a sinner, Tony, for I took the life that wasn't mine to take, but there is a way open for me to forgiveness if you'll help me. Won't you help me, please, Tony?'

"She looked so beautiful and sorrowful and appealing that before I realized what I did I'd put my arms around her and was drawing her to me. I could feel her in my arms, feel the pressure of her body against mine. It was no ghost I held, but a sweet living girl, the same one I'd embraced a thousand times before.

"She didn't shrink from me nor hold back when I bent to kiss her, but—I don't quite know how to say it—something something I could feel but couldn't see, seemed to come into the room just then. I can't describe it, really. It wasn't palpable, and yet it was. I couldn't see nor hear nor feel it, but I knew it was there. A thing invisible and soundless had displaced some of the room's air—you know how it



is when you're standing in a phone booth and someone else crowds in, but doesn't touch you? And I had a sense of being watched."

"Watched? Inimically?" de Grandin prompted as the boy stopped with a puzzled frown.

"No, sir. It was as if someone very sad, but not at all hostile, stared at me with a long, calm look." His shapely slim hands made a gesture of futility. "It's just impossible to describe, sir. There was no chill, no fear, no sensation I can name at all, but I suddenly felt she and I were not alone, and kissing her right then would be —well, sort of indecent.

"She stepped back from my arms and put her hands upon my shoulders. 'Listen, Tony dear,' she told me, 'listen carefully; this is terribly important. See.' From her dress she drew a big red rose and put it in my hand. 'This is from me, dear, the only gift that I can give you now. Do you recognize it?'

"I looked, and thought I did. Among the flowers I'd sent for her funeral was a spray of Gloire de Dijon roses, twenty-two of them, one for each year of her life.

'Keep it, Tony,' she added, 'it will help you realize this is not a dream you're having. Kneel, dearest.'

"The veronal had started working by this time, and I was getting dizzy. I don't know whether I knelt purposely or whether I stumbled and fell, but next moment I was on my knees before her and she held her hands against my lips. Somehow that—that presence—which came into the room with her didn't seem forbidding any more, and I kissed her fingers, starting with the little finger of her right hand, counting off ten kisses, and ending with her left little finger. Then, very gently, she drew her hands from mine and laid them on my eyes."

THE look of simulated interest with which de Grandin had regarded Strapoli gave way to an amiable frown of concentration. "And when she did this you saw something?" he demanded almost sharply.

The young man's shoulders came up in a puzzled shrug. "Yes, sir, I did, but it didn't seem to make much sense."

"Suppose you tell us what you saw, and let us be the judges of its sense or senselessness, *Monsieur.*"

"At first I saw nothing but indistinguishable blackness, just as you always do when you first close your eyes; then, as the pressure of her fingers on my lids seemed to grow, the black appeared to fade to a dark blue, and soon this was all shot with stars, like the sky on a clear night before the moon has risen. Then slowly, like the fade-in in a motion picture, the image of a house appeared against the sky, not quite shutting out the star-specked heavens, but seemingly imposed on them. It was a big house, something like this, but with more grounds around it, and with evergreens growing by the porch. I saw it plainly, but in miniature, as if it were very far away, or as if I looked at it through the wrong end of an opera glass. There were no lights in any of the windows, but a sort of soft illumination, like moonlight, made it plain as day to me."

"And what occurred then, if you please?"

"Nothing, sir. I knelt there, looking at that house through my closed eyelids for what seemed several minutes; then I felt the pressure on my lids lighten, and when I opened my eyes I was alone, kneeling in the center of the room with a big red rose in my hand.

"I started to get up, but the veronal had taken hold, and I fell forward in a heap and lay there in a drugged sleep till almost noon today. When I recovered consciousness I'd have thought it all a dream, if it were not for this." From the breast pocket of his dinner coat he drew a tissue paper parcel, handling it as reverently as if it were a sacred relic.

The soft white wrappings came away, revealing a great red Gloire de Dijon rose, slightly wilted and with several petals coming loose, but still retaining its deep color and breathing forth a rich scent from its golden heart.

"This was still clutched in my hand when I waked," he told us. "Something, I don't know what, told me that it was from the spray I'd sent to Stephanola, and as quickly as I could I dressed and hurried to the cemetery. All the floral tributes were in place around her grave or on it, and almost at the mound's head, where her breast would be, they'd put my spray of roses. I counted every blossom on it. There were twenty-one left."

Slowly de Grandin poured three drinks, tendering one to our guest, one to me.

"No, thanks," the young man refused. "Sometimes I drink a little wine. I never touch hard liquor."

"*Mon Dieu,* and you have such an amiable face, too!" de Grandin exclaimed in a shocked voice. Then: "*Eh bien,* whatever

else you were last night, you were not drunk when you beheld this vision, *mon vieux.*"

A reproachful look came into the young man's dark eyes. "You don't believe me, sir!" he almost wept.

"Par la barbe d'un bouc vert, I do, my friend," the little Frenchman answered earnestly, "but there are some features of your vision which daunt me. Precisely, what is it that you would have me do?"

Strapoli smiled sadly. "I think I've come to you for moral support more than anything else," he replied. "Mr. Sainpolis told me you were an expert in the occult, and I'd like to have your opinion——" He paused, swallowed once or twice; then, hurriedly: "Did I do wrong to let the vision stay, or should I have sent it—her—away with an invocation of the Trinity? I went to Father Anastapoul this morning and told him everything, and he tells me I was wrong. He says the living have no right to contacts with the dead except through prayer, and that demons often take the forms of those we loved in life to lure us to damnation."

"The reverend father has some factual basis for his statement," de Grandin answered with a thoughtful nod. "It is unfortunately all too true that what we thought the spiritual manifestation of one we loved turns out to be a foul succubus, but I should say the evidence in this particular case seems to point otherwhere. Tell me, *Monsieur,* what does your own heart say?"

"Why, that I did no wrong, sir. I believe it was Stephanola, not her ghost or spirit, but herself, and that she came to me for help because she loves me, just as I love her. There's nothing I would not have done for her when she was living; why should I deny her aid, now that she's dead?"

Tears were streaming down his face, and other tears were glinting on de Grandin's lashes as he answered, "Why, indeed, my friend? Do not attempt to evoke her—as you value your salvation do not seek communication with her through a spiritualistic medium—but if she comes again unbidden, receive her as a lover should. You would not have hurt her living; can you find it in your heart to hurt the helpless dead?"

"WHAT d'ye make of it?" I asked as the door closed on our visitor. "Did he actually see her, or was it just a tired brain in a tired body, plus a dose of veronal, that gave him an hallucination?"

He shrugged his shoulders. *"Le bon Dieu* knows, not I. There is much truth in that old saying that the wish is father to the thought. Who of us has not heard the voice of one whom he has loved and lost—perhaps beheld him? Such experiences come oftenest when we are in that no man's land between full consciousness and sleep. It is entirely possible he wished so hard for her that his tired senses heard the pleadings of his heart and vouchsafed him a vision. On the other hand, we have the rose for evidence."

"Yes, but the rose might have been there all the time," I argued. "Gloire de Dijons were her favorite flowers; he might possibly have bought one, put it in a vase, and then forgotten it. And as for one blossom being missing from the spray out in the cemetery, the wonder is that there were any left. I noticed how the young men hurried with the flowers following the funeral. If Mr. Martin had caught them he'd have given them a lecture. I've often heard him say the floral tributes deserve almost as great care as the body, because they're tokens of love."

"An estimable man, that Monsieur Martin," he returned. "He is a funeral director in a thousand. Come, let us go and drink to him."

"Bedad, sor, he's at it again, th' impident spalpeen!" Sergeant Costello

stalked into our breakfast room, his usually florid face gone almost apoplectic with fury.

"*Morbleu,* do you say so? And who in Satan's foul name is he, and what has he been at?" de Grandin answered with a grin.

"Why, this here now felly, th' one that ye were afther readin' about in Miss Sainpolis' diary. Bad cess to 'im, wid th' pore young gur-rl hardly cold in her grave he's goin' round burglarizin' houses an' lavin' fingerprints all over th' place. Ouch, it's th' brazen one he is! Belike he thinks we didn't check her fingerprints when we found that she wuz dead, an' o' course, he don't know nothin' about th' diary, so he thinks he's safe as long as——"

"One moment, if you please!" de Grandin shut him off. "Me, I feel the birth-pains of an idea stirring in my brain. I have what you call the hunch!" He raised a hand to enjoin silence; then: "Where did he commit this latest outrage?"

" 'Twas Misther Westmorsham's house, out on th' Bordentown Road, sor. Th' family wuz to Atlantic City, an' th' servants had been given time off. This mornin' they come back to find th' house picked clean as a wishbone, wid furs an' silverware and jools and Lord knows what all carted off.

"An' how d'ye s'pose he got in? Why, through th' front door, if ye plaze. Jimmied it and walked right in, as bold as brass. We know he done it sometime between midnight an' this mornin', for th' harness bull on th' beat tried th' door at twelve an' one, an' agin at half-past three. At half-past six this mornin' a prowl car passin' by seen it wide open, an' when they went in to investigate they found th' whole place gutted clean as anny carcass in a butcher-shop."

"*Parbleu,* it strikes a chord, my friends!" de Grandin cried. "Me, I have the idea. *Oui-da, ma petite pauvre,* I get the message which you sent!"

"Howly Moses, Doctor Trowbridge, sor, d'ye let him sthart his drinkin' so early in th' mornin'?" Costello asked me in well-simulated reproach.

"Never mind the ill-timed witticisms, thou great stupid one," de Grandin shot back. "Come with me, at once, immediately, right away. Take me to this house of Monsieur Westmorsham, let me look at it, and I will show you how to lay this miscreant by the heels. Come, hurry, we waste time!"

THE supper show was more than half done when the captain showed us to our table at the Casa Ayer. The slow, deliberately erotic notes of *Mood Indigo* trickled like a spate of hot spiced wine from the battery of saxophones set in the front rank of the orchestra while several young and shapely women cavorted on the dance floor in a flood of purple light.

De Grandin waved the menu card aside. "I have not the hunger," he announced. "Bring me a dozen lobster sandwiches and a pint of champagne *brut,* no more."

I ordered a Welsh rarebit and a mug of ale, and looked around the darkened room. Here and there a man's shirtfront or a woman's shoulders gleamed in dim highlight, but for the most part the whole place was steeped in shadow. On the stand before the orchestra I descried our visitor of the night before leading the musicians with the deftness of long practise, his task mechanical as drawing breath.

At the table next to us a party of two women with their escorts talked in strident tones, decrying music, food and entertainment. As a match flared I caught sight of them. The women were the sort one might expect to see at night clubs, powdered, painted, curled and bleached until all semblance of their natural selves had vanished. Curiously, although they wore the irreducible minimum of clothes, they seemed overdressed. One of the men faced

from me; the other I saw full face in the orange flare of the match, and instinctively I hated him. Somehow, for all his obviously freshly-shaven face and spotless linen, he seemed unclean. Dark-skinned he was, swarthy as a mulatto, with curling black hair, full, red lips and dancing black eyes. But though he smiled it seemed to me he did so more in contempt than merriment, and the gleam in his eyes was decidedly more malicious than jocund. Handsome he was, certainly, but in the way that Mephistopheles is pictured; cruel, arrogant and vicious.

"My Gawd," I heard him sneer, "d'je ever see a cornier show?"

The match winked out, and as the darkness hid him from me I heard the clinking chime of metal on the tiled floor. He had offered the ultimate in insults to the club's talent, flung a fistful of coppers to them.

The lights flashed on and de Grandin beckoned to a waiter, handing him a note. In a moment young Strapoli joined us.

"You have something to tell me, sir?" he asked as we shook hands.

"Not now, a little later, perhaps," returned de Grandin. "First, I would have you tell me something. You recognize this picture, *hein?*" From his pocket he produced a small photograph and showed it to Strapoli.

The young man studied it a moment, and I saw his face go pale. "Yes, sir!" he replied emphatically. "That's the house I saw last night when Stephanola put her hands against my eyes. I'd recognize it anywhere. It's a real place, then?"

"*Assurément,* very real," de Grandin answered somewhat grimly, "and your recognition of it makes clear something which has puzzled me. I think I know now what it is that *Mademoiselle la Morte Amoureuse* attempts to tell us, and why. Attend me, if you please, my friend: It is more than merely probable that she will come to you again, and when she comes it is a certainty that she will show another of these mansions in the sky to you."

"Yes, sir?" expectantly.

"*Précisément.* When this occurs you are to notify me instantly. You comprehend?"

"But suppose she comes at night, as she most likely will——"

"Whether morning, noon or night, my friend, you are to let me know immediately. It is of the greatest importance."

Mystified, but willing to co-operate, Strapoli turned to rejoin his band, but as he passed the table next to ours he tripped, stumbled, and fell full length upon the floor.

"You"—he rose, eyes blazing as he faced the dark-skinned man who had flung coppers to the dancers—"you tripped me!"

"Yeah, I tripped yuh. So what?" the other countered, rising from his chair and lurching forward menacingly.

Strapoli's hand drew back, but before he had a chance to strike, the other was upon him, bringing up his knee and striking him violently in the stomach. It was as foul a blow as I had ever seen, and Strapoli crumpled to the floor, the breath completely knocked from him.

"Get fresh wid me, punk, will ya?" snarled the swarthy one. "For two cents I'd send yuh where I sent——" he broke off, laughing, and turned to his companions.

"C'mon, let's blow his lousy joint," he ordered.

Astoundingly, none of the waiters or attendants made a move to stop him as he swaggered from the place, and as we lifted Tony to his feet I whispered, "Don't you want to prosecute him? He attacked you without provocation, and both Doctor de Grandin and I will testify we saw him start the fight——"

"Oh, no, sir, thank you," he mumbled as he rearranged his clothes. "We wouldn't dare do that."

"No, and why not?" asked de Grandin.

"That's Niccolo Frezzi—Nick the Brute—sir; he's the toughest mug in town. They'd lie for me and beat me up if I had him arrested. No one ever dares to cross him

"He's suspected of all kinds of crimes, but the police can't pin anything on him, and if anybody dares appear against him, even in a traffic case, he's sure to get a dreadful beating in a day or two. Everybody knows that Nick the Brute does it, but there's never any legal proof of it, so——"

He brushed a fleck of dust from his sleeve and walked unsteadily to his place on the bandstand.

IT WAS hardly daylight when the call came. Strapoli's voice was half hysterical.

"She's been here, sir," I heard him tell de Grandin as I picked up the extension telephone which stood beside my bed. "What? Yes, sir; she showed me another house——"

"Très bon, my friend, arise and dress. I shall join you instantly."

In five minutes we were rushing through the dawn-gray streets toward Strapoli's apartment, pausing only to pick up Costello.

"Sure, an' this hunch o' yours had better be a good one," the sergeant growled as he climbed in beside us. "Gittin' a man up at th' crack o' dawn——"

"Be quiet," broke in de Grandin. "Unless I am much more mistaken than I think we shall crack other things beside the dawn before we finish this day's work. You have a two-foot length of hose in readiness?"

"Hose?—Fer th' love o' Mike, sor——"

"Exactement. Did not you say you would enjoy a conversation with this so vile Niccolo—you and a length of rubber hose?"

"O' course, sor, but——"

"No buts, my friend. I have the idea who this Niccolo is. If all goes as I think that it will go, I shall deliver him into your hands before so very long."

STRAPOLI waited for us on his doorstep.

"Sorry I couldn't call you sooner," he apologized, "but I fell asleep again when Stephanola left, and just woke up a little while ago."

"Never mind," de Grandin answered. "You are sure that you can recognize the house she showed you?"

"Certain, sir."

"Très bien." Slowly, looking carefully from right to left, we cruised the residential sections of the city, beginning at the eastern suburbs, weaving slowly across town, finally threading through the wider avenues of the west end.

Abruptly, "There it is; I recognize it!" Tony called as we idled past a big house in Tunlaw Street. "I'd know it anywhere."

Costello consulted a typed list. "Yep, this is one of 'em," he announced. "Th' Fanshaws live here, but they're all in Florida. We have instructions to kape a special watch on it."

"U'm? Let us see how well instructions have been carried out," de Grandin replied as we walked across the lawn.

Step by careful step we circled the place, testing door and window fastenings. Everything was in order.

"All right, sor, an' where do we go from here?" the sergeant asked.

De Grandin took his chin between his thumb and forefinger. At length: "Who has the keys?" he asked.

Costello referred to his list again. "They're at th' family lawyer's, but——"

"No buts, if you will be so kind. Secure them all soon, and bring at least two officers to mount guard in the house. The robber has not yet appeared, but I am confident he will."

ALL day we waited for a summons to the Fanshaw house, but none came. By dinner time de Grandin was as nervous as a cat; when nine o'clock had sounded he was almost frantic.

"She cannot do this," he declared. "But no, she cannot make the fool of Jules de Grandin."

"What the deuce are you maundering about?" I asked.

"No matter, let us go and see for ourselves. I will phone Monsieur Strapoli to accompany us; he is not due at Casa Ayer till eleven."

The big old house was quiet as a tomb as Strapoli, de Grandin, Costello and I let ourselves in at the kitchen door.

"Seen anything?" the sergeant asked the patrolman waiting in the kitchen.

"Everything quiet as the stock exchange on Sunday, sir."

"Umph? What's next, sor?" the sergeant asked de Grandin.

"First we reconnoiter the terrain, then we sit and wait his coming. Be assured, he will come, my friends. The dead do not make jokes."

From room to room we walked, led by the beam of his flashlight. The place was still with that dead silence peculiar to deserted houses, and I had an eery feeling we were not alone, that unseen eyes were on us, watching with sardonic amusement.

"Halte la!" de Grandin ordered as we paused upon the threshold of the drawing-room. *"A silence,* he is coming, I think!"

Softly, so softly that it might have been mistaken for the scraping of a wind-blown branch against the window-pane, a sound came to us from the high French window overlooking the side garden. It came again, louder this time; then a sharp click sounded as the sash swung inward.

Against the back-drop of the cloudy starless night the window showed oblong and dark; dark and empty, like a hole. Then, barely darker than the outer darkness, we saw it: a man's form cased in skin-smooth tights, head covered by a tight hood—no chance for fallen hairs to give police a clue — hands encased in what seemed rubber gloves.

For a moment he paused on the sill like a cat about to leap down from a fence; then soundlessly he dropped into the room and seemed to fade into the shadows.

We were four to one, and two of us were armed, but for an instant terror gripped me by the throat. There was something so inhuman in the tight-clothed burglar, such a suggestion of uncanny cruelty and power. . . .

De Grandin broke the spell. *"Eh bien, Monsieur le Voleur,* you are very welcome!" he announced. "We have waited long, but not with patience——"

Flashlights cleft the blackness, and like miniature lightnings came the flamings of two pistols, then a third. Boots pounded on the hardwood floors as the two patrolmen rushed to join us. I saw a shadow loom against the window for an instant, then saw it topple inward as a whirring missile struck it.

"Tur-rn on th' lights, ye omadhauns!" Costello bellowed, and after a brief fumble a switch clicked, almost blinding us with the sudden brilliance from the chandelier. Before the window lay a figure cased in clinging black silk jersey like an acrobat's costume, save that a hood-like helmet covered neck and chin and head, leaving only a small oblong of face visible, and this was barred by the wisp of a black silk mask. Beside the supine body lay de Grandin's little automatic; a larger weapon was half clutched in one of the man's flaccid, rubber-gloved hands.

Costello leaned and snatched the mask off of the fellow's face. I recognized him instantly: the man who threw the coppers at the Casa Ayer, then tripped and beat Tony Strapoli.

"Well, well," the sergeant chuckled.

"Nick th' Brute in person, an' not a movin' pitcher. We got dead wood on 'im at last——"

"He is also the Niccolo mentioned in the poor Sainpolis girl's diary," de Grandin added.

"Th' divil!"

"Not quite, but almost, *mon sergent.* See, I saved him for you. I might have shot him, but I chose to throw my pistol at his head and stun him."

"Whatever for, sor? Why should ye be so tender——"

The little Frenchman grinned. "Did not I hear you once remark that you would like a quarter-hour's conversation with this one —you and a piece of rubber hose? Very well, then. You would not enjoy such a conversation with a wounded man."

"Be gob, ye're right, sor. It'll be a pleasure——"

"Doctor!" one of the patrolmen called. "This feller's hit bad——"

In our excitement we had failed to notice that Strapoli was not with us. Now we turned to see him lying by the farther wall, a spreading stain across his shirtfront. From the corners of his mouth there welled twin rivulets of blood. De Grandin gave a softly deprecating exclamation. *"C'est trop fort*—he is shot through the lung, my friend. See, it is a pulmonary hemorrhage!"

Strapoli's pulse was weakening rapidly, almost all semblance of expression had faded from his eyes, yet as we knelt beside him he achieved the vestige of a smile.

"Mon pauvre garçon," whispered de Grandin, "we have him in a vise, he cannot wriggle from the clutches of the law this time, and we shall make him pay through the nose——"

STRAPOLI paid no heed. His almost-vacant eyes were fixed on something which we could not see, something which appeared to be a foot or so above and before him. He raised his hands, palms facing, then drew them downward toward him. The pantomime was perfect. He held a face between his palms, drew it closer, closer to his own . . . "Stephanola!" he murmured, and we saw his lips form in a kiss, then fall apart as a bright cataract of blood poured through them, and he fell back, supine, on the floor.

The two policemen arranged him, folded hands across his breast, dropped a coat over his face. De Grandin knelt in prayer a moment, then bounded up to join Costello.

"An' it'll be th' hot squat for yours, bozo," the sergeant was saying almost jocularly to the man in tights who was now regaining consciousness. "Ye've made a monkey o' th' law a long, long time, but this time we've put th' finger on ye. Ye'll not be batin' th' rap this time. Them rubber gloves ye're wearin', wid th' pore gurrl's prints stuck on 'em, will pin a dozen burglaries on ye, but ye'll niver do a day o' time for 'em. Oh, no, my bucko! Ye've kilt a man in th' commission o' th' felony o' housebreakin', an' it's th' electric chair that ye'll be warmin' before firecrackers pop, so help me."

The two patrolmen were arguing. "Of course I didn't put it there," denied one hotly. "Where the devil would I get it in this empty house; besides do I look like an undertaker or sumpin?"

"Well, where'd it come from, then?"

"Whist, ye divils, have ye no shame? Where's ye're rayspict for th' dead?" Costello reproved in a bull-bellow. "What's all th' fussin' for?"

"Aw, Sarge, Milligan says I put this flower on 'im, an' I told him he was fulla prunes. Where'd I get a flower in this place?"

"What flower?" broke in Costello.

"This one, right here, sir," the young patrolman pointed to Strapoli's body.

Clasped in the pale hands folded on his breast Strapoli held a lovely Gloire de

Dijon rose, fresh, dew-jeweled, breathing out a cloud of perfume from its golden heart.

"Do not dispute, *mes enfants,*" de Grandin ordered. "We know the donor of that flower." He laid a hand upon his breast and made a sweeping bow to the great empty room. *"Félicitations, mes amis,"* he said, as if congratulating an affianced couple.

"QUITE yes, but how can one explain it otherwise?" he said as we foregathered in my study shortly after midnight. "Did not she give the explanation when she first appeared to young Strapoli? But certainly. 'I have sinned, but there is a way open to forgiveness,' she told him. Of course, if she could bring this so vile Niccolo to justice she would acquire merit, perhaps attain to pardon for her self-destruction.

"She and the young Strapoli were in love, hence *en rapport.* She could, it seems, appear to him at will, while others could not sense her presence.

"When first he told us of his experience, how she laid her hands upon his eyes and made him see that mansion in the sky, I thought the whole occurrence too fantastic to be other than a dream.

"Ha, but next morning when you came with tidings of the burglary, I had at once the thought:

." 'He saw a house, a big, fine, empty house last night . . . such a mansion has been burglarized . . . Jules de Grandin, get a picture of that house and show it to the young Strapoli. If he recognizes it as the one his vision showed him, that is what she meant.'

"Parbleu, I did; he did, and the case was proved. *Assurément.*

" 'She has foreknowledge of the naughty Niccolo's intentions,' I tell me. 'When next she gives her lover the impression of a house, we have only to go there and wait his coming.'

"Tenez, she came again. She showed him another house; he told us; we searched until we found the house of his vision. We waited there—*voilà.*"

Circe

By EDGAR DANIEL KRAMER

Though you have made me a ghostly shadow,
A wraith of the glory that might have been;
Though you kissed my mouth, then laughed and led me
Into the shadowy ways of sin;
Though you took my youth like a fragrant flower
To cast it from you a withered bloom;
Though my dreams are dead and faith lies broken,
The while I grope through a world of gloom;
Though you held me close on your lips of rapture,
As the red rose clings to the gleaming dew;
Though you broke my heart, then laughed and left me,
If you would call, I would come to you!

The Phantom Werewolf

MONTAGUE SUMMERS, in his excellent monograph, *The Werewolf*, tells the following incident which was related to him as an actual happening that took place in the late 1880's. Despite its brevity, it is a perfect weird tale; so we reprint it herewith:—

"AN Oxford professor, being an ardent fisherman, had taken a small cottage for the summer on the shores of one of the remoter lakes in Merionethshire, among the hills, and here he and his wife were entertaining a guest. Whilst wading one day a few yards into the lake he stumbled over an object which seemed upon examination to be the skull of a dog belonging to an uncommonly large breed. Desirous of investigating further he carried it back to the house, where it was temporarily placed on a kitchen shelf.

"That evening his wife had been left alone awhile, and to her surprise not unmixed with fear she heard a snuffling and scratching at the kitchen door which led into the yard. Hesitant lest she should be confronted with a fierce dog, she went into the room to make sure the door was barred. As she moved, something drew her attention to the window, and there she saw glaring at her through the diamond panes the head of a huge creature, half animal, half human. The cruel panting jaws were gaping wide and showed keen white teeth; the great furry paws clasped the sill like hands; the red eyes gleamed hideously; it was the gaze of a man, horribly intensive, horribly intelligent. Half fainting with fear she ran through to the front door and shot the bolt.

"A moment after she heard heavy breathing outside and the latch rattled menacingly. The minutes that followed were full of acutest suspense, and now and again a low snarl would be heard at the door or window, and a sound as though the creature were endeavoring to force its entrance. At last the voices of her husband and his friend, come back from their ramble, sounded in the little garden; and as they knocked, finding the door fast, she was but able to open ere she fell in a swoon at their feet.

"When her senses returned, to find herself laid on the sofa and her husband anxiously bending over her, she told in halting accents what had happened.

"That night, having made all secure and extinguished the lamps, the two men sat up quietly, armed with stout sticks and a gun.

"The hours passed slowly, until when all was darkest and most lonely the soft thud of cushioned paws was heard on the gravel outside, and nails scratched at the kitchen window. To their horror, in a stale phosphorescent light they saw the hideous mask of a wolf with the eyes of a man glaring through the glass, eyes that were red with hellish rage. Snatching the gun they rushed to the door, but it had seen their movement and was away in a moment. As they issued from the house a shadowy undefined shape slipped through the open gate, and in the stars they could just see a huge animal making toward the lake, into which it disappeared silently, nor did a ruffle cross the surface of the water.

"Early the next morning the professor took the skull, and rowing a little way out from the shore flung it as far as possible into the deeper part of the tarn. The werewolf was never seen again."

"Now there happened a strange and inexplicable thing."

The Willow Landscape

By CLARK ASHTON SMITH

A weird Chinese fantasy

THE picture was more than five hundred years old; but time had not changed its colors, unless to touch them with the mellow softness of ancient hours, the gathering morbidezza of bygone things. It had been painted by a great artist of the Sung dynasty, on silk of the finest weave, and mounted on ebony rollers tipped with silver. For twelve generations it had been one of the most cher-

ished possessions of Shih Liang's forefathers. And it was equally cherished by Shih Liang himself, who, like all his ancestors, was a scholar, a poet, and a lover of all beauty shared by art and nature. Often, in his dreamiest or most meditative moods, he would unroll the painting and gaze upon its idyllic loveliness with the feeling of one who retires to the remoteness and seclusion of a mountain-warded valley. It consoled him in a measure for the bustle and blare and intrigue of the imperial court, where he held an official post of no small honor: since he was not altogether native to such things and would have preferred, like the olden sages, the philosophic peace of a hermitage bowered amid some leafy grove.

The picture represented a pastoral scene of the most ideal and visionary beauty. In the background arose lofty mountains rendered vague by the slow withdrawal of morning mists; in the foreground a little stream descended in mimic turbulence to a tranquil lake, and was crossed on its way by a rustic bridge of bamboo, more charming than if it were made of royal lacquer. Beyond the stream and around the lake were willows of vernal green more lovely than anything ever beheld except in vision or memory. Incomparable was their grace, ineffable their waving: they were like the willows of Shou Shan, the Taoist paradise; and they trailed their foliage as leaning women trail their unbound hair. Partly hidden among them was a tiny hut; and a maiden dressed in peony pink and white was crossing the bamboo bridge. Somehow the picture was more than a painting, was more than an actual scene: it possessed all the enchantment of far-off things for which the heart has longed vainly, the charm of forfeit years and lost places. Surely the artist had mingled with its hues the diviner iris of dream or of retrospect, and the wine-sweet tears of a nostalgia long denied.

Shih Liang felt that he knew the landscape more intimately than any real scene. Each time that he gazed upon it, his sensations were those of a returning wanderer. It became to him the cool and sequestered retreat in which he found a never-failing refuge from the weariness of his days. And though he was of an ascetic turn and had never married nor sought the company of women, the presence of the peony maiden on the bridge was by no means exceptionable; in fact, her tiny figure, with its more than mortal charm, was somehow an essential part of the composition and was no less important to its perfection than the stream, the willows, the lake, and the far mountains with their riven veils of mist. And she seemed to companion him in the visits and sojournings of revery, when he would imagine himself repairing to the little hut or roaming beneath the delicate foliage.

In truth, Shih Liang had need of such refuge and companionship, illusory though they were. Aside from his younger brother, Po Lung, a boy of sixteen, he was without living relatives or comrades; and the family fortunes, declining through several generations, had left him the heritor of many debts and little cash or property, except a number of priceless art-treasures. His life was increasingly sad, and oppressed by ill-health and poverty. Much of the stipend from his secretarial post at the court was necessarily devoted to the canceling of inherited obligations; and the remainder was barely enough for his own sustenance and the education of his brother.

SHIH LIANG was approaching middle age; and his honorable heart was rejoicing over the payment of the last family debt, when there came a fresh stroke of misfortune. Through no fault of his own, but the machinations of an envious fellow-scholar, Shih Liang was dismissed from his position and found himself without means of support. No other post offered

itself; for an unmerited disgrace was attached to the imperial dismissal. In order to procure the necessities of life and continue his brother's education, Shih Liang was now forced to sell one by one the irreplaceable heirlooms, the antique carvings of jade and ivory, the rare porcelains and paintings of the ancestral collection. This he did with extreme reluctance, with a sense of utter shame and profanation, such as could be felt only by a true lover of such things, and by one whose soul was consecrated to the past and to the memory of his fathers.

The days and years went by, the collection dwindled piece by piece; and the time drew near when the studies of Po Lung would be completed, when he would be a scholar versed in all the classics and eligible for a position of both honor and profit. . . . But now the porcelains and lacquers, the jades and ivories had all been sold; and the paintings were likewise gone, all except the willow landscape so dearly cherished by Shih Liang.

A mortal and inassuageable sorrow, a dismay colder than the chill of death itself, entered Shih Liang's heart when he realized the truth. It seemed to him that he could no longer live if he should sell the picture. But if he did not sell it, how could he complete the fraternal duty which he owed to Po Lung? There was but one possible course; and he sent word at once to the mandarin Mung Li, a connoisseur who had purchased other pieces from the old collection, telling him that the willow picture was now for sale. Mung Li had long coveted this picture. He came in person, his eyes gleaming in his fat face with the avidity of a collector who scents a bargain; and the transaction was soon made. The money was paid at once; but Shih Liang begged leave to retain the picture for another day before delivering it to the mandarin.

And knowing that Shih Liang was a man of honor, Mung Li assented to this request.

When the mandarin had gone, Shih Liang unrolled the landscape and hung it on the wall. His stipulation to Mung Li had been prompted by the irresistible feeling that he must have one more hour of communion with the beloved scene, must repair once more in revery to its inviolate retreat. After that, he would be as one without a home or a sanctuary: for he knew that in all the world, whether in art or reality, there was nothing that could afford a like asylum for his dreams.

The mellowing rays of earliest eventide were sifted upon the silk volumen where it hung on the bare wall; but for Shih Liang the painting was steeped in a light of supernal enchantment, was touched by more than the muted splendor of the falling sun. And it seemed to him that never before had the foliage been so tender with immortal spring, or the mist about the mountain so glamorous with eternally dissolving opal, or the maiden upon the bridge so lovely with unfading youth. And somehow, by an unaccountable sorcery of perspective, the painting itself had grown larger and deeper, and had mysteriously assumed even more of the illusion of an actual place.

With unshed tears in his heart, like an exile who bids farewell to his natal valley, Shih Liang enjoyed the sorrowful luxury of looking upon the willow picture for the last time. As on a thousand former occasions, his fancy strolled beneath the branches and beside the lake, it inhabited the hut whose roof was so tantalizingly revealed and concealed, it peered at the mountain-tops from behind the foliage, or paused upon the bridge to converse with the peony maiden.

And now there happened a strange and inexplicable thing. Though the sun had gone down while Shih Liang continued to gaze and dream, and twilight had thick-

ened in the room, the picture itself was no less plain and luminous than before, as if it were lit by another sun than that of contemporary time and space. And the landscape had grown even larger, till it seemed to Shih Liang that he was looking through an open door on a veritable scene.

Then, as bewilderment assailed him, he heard a whisper that was not an actual voice, but which seemed to issue from the landscape and become audible as a thought in his mind. And the whisper said:

"Because you have loved me so long and so dearly, and because your heart is native here but alien to all the world beside, it is now permitted that I should become for you the very refuge of which you have dreamed, and a place in which you can wander and abide for ever.

So, with the surpassing joy of one whose fondest dream has been verified, who inherits the heaven of his revery, Shih Liang passed from the twilight room into the morning picture. And the ground was soft with a flower-embroidered grass beneath his heel; and the willow leaves murmured in an April wind that blew from long ago; and he saw the door of the half-hidden hut as he had never seen it before except in fancy; and the peony maiden smiled when he approached her, and answered his greeting in a voice that was like the speech of the willows and the blossoms.

The disappearance of Shih Liang was a matter of brief concern to those who had known him. It was readily believed that his financial sorrows had driven him to suicide, probably by drowning in the great river that ran beside the capital.

Po Lung, having received the money left by his brother from the sale of the last painting, was enabled to finish his education.

The willow landscape, which had been found hanging on the wall of Shih Liang's abode, was duly claimed by its purchaser, the mandarin Mung Li.

The mandarin was delighted with his acquisition; but there was one detail which puzzled him considerably when he unrolled the volumen and examined it. He could remember only one figure, a maiden in pink and white, on the rustic bamboo bridge; and now there were two figures! Mung Li inspected the second figure with much curiosity, and was doubly surprised when he noted that it bore a singular resemblance to Shih Liang. But it was very tiny, like that of the maiden; and his eyes were dim from peering at so many porcelains and lacquers and paintings; so he could not be entirely sure. However, it was undeniably peculiar.

Mung Li might have thought the matter still stranger, if he had looked more often at the painting. He might have found that the peony maiden and the person who resembled Shih Liang were sometimes engaged in other diversions than that of merely passing the time of day on the bamboo bridge.

"Again and again I saw a winged man soar up through the whirling smoke, gripping a shrieking girl in his arms."

Almuric

By ROBERT E. HOWARD

An amazing story from the pen of a master of weird fiction, which begins on our planet and ends in the demon-haunted world Almuric

The Story Thus Far

ESAU CAIRN, the strongest athlete on Earth, kills the political boss of his city, and flees for protection to the laboratory of Professor Hildebrand. That great scientist, who has recently discovered the Great Secret—how to transport living beings to other planets by dematerializing them—sends Esau to a distant world known as Almuric.

Esau lives for several months in the Hills, peopled by weird animal forms against which he wages continual war. He finally leaves the Hills and goes to a city of black rock, where he is captured by the ape-like men of that strange city. The women are smooth-skinned and beautiful like those of our own world, but the men are shaggy-haired and great-muscled, and live by hunting.

Esau is taken into the tribe after a terrific duel with Ghor, the strongest of the Almurians. He is given the name of Esau Ironhand for his mighty feat in vanquishing Ghor.

The planet is divided into two hemispheres by a great natural wall of stone, and extremely weird winged people live on the farther hemisphere, according to legend.

Altha, daughter of the chief of the Kothans (the tribe into which Esau has been admitted), falls in love with Esau.

The story continues:

PART II

I HAD wandered far in my hunting. Alone I had spent several nights on the plains. Now I was returning leisurely, but I was still many miles from Koth, whose massive towers I could not yet glimpse across the waving savannas. I cannot say what my thoughts were as I swung along, my carbine in the crook of my arm, but they were likely concerned with spoors in the water's edge, crushed-down grass marking the passing of some large animal, or the scents borne on the light wind.

Whatever my thoughts may have been, they were interrupted suddenly by a shrill cry. Wheeling, I saw a slim white figure racing across the grassy level toward me. Behind her, gaining with every stride, came one of those giant carnivorous birds which are among the most dangerous of all the grisly denizens of the grasslands. They tower ten feet in height and somewhat resemble an ostrich except for the beak, which is a huge curving weapon, three feet in length, pointed and edged like a simitar. A stroke of that beak can slash a man asunder, and the great taloned feet of the monster can tear a human limb from limb.

This mountain of destruction was hurtling along behind the flying girl at appalling speed, and I knew it would overtake her long before I could hope to reach them. Cursing the necessity for depending on my none too accurate marksmanship, I lifted my carbine and took as steady an aim as possible. The girl was directly in line with the brute, and I could not risk a shot at the huge body, lest I hit her instead. I had to chance a shot at the great head that bobbed bafflingly on the long arching neck.

It was more luck than skill that sent my bullet home. At the crack of the shot the giant head jerked backward as if the monster had run into an unseen wall. The stumpy wings thrashed thunderously, and staggering erratically, the brute pitched to the earth.

The girl fell at the same instant, as if the same bullet had brought them both down. Running forward to bend over her, I was surprised to see Altha, daughter of Zal, looking up at me with her dark enigmatic eyes. Quickly satisfying myself that she was not injured, outside of fright and exhaustion, I turned to the thunder-bird and found it quite dead, its few brains oozing out of a hole in its narrow skull.

Turning back to Altha, I scowled down at her.

"What are you doing outside the city?" I demanded. "Are you quite mad, to venture so far into the wilderness alone?"

She made no reply, but I sensed a hurt in her dark eyes, and I repented the roughness of my speech. I dropped down on one knee beside her.

"You are a strange girl, Altha," I said. "You are not like the other women of

Koth. Folk say you are wilful and rebellious without reason. I do not understand you. Why should you risk your life like this?"

"What will you do now?" she demanded.

"Why, take you back to the city, of course."

Her eyes smoldered with a curious sullenness.

"You will take me back, and my father will whip me. But I will run away again—and again—and again!"

"But why should you run away?" I asked in bewilderment. "There is nowhere for you to go. Some beast will devour you."

"So!" she answered. "Perhaps it is my wish to be devoured."

"Then why did you run from the thunder-bird?"

"The instinct to live is hard to conquer," she admitted.

"But why should you wish to die?" I expostulated. "The women of Koth are happy, and you have as much as any."

She looked away from me, out across the broad plains.

"To eat, drink and sleep is not all," she answered in a strange voice. "The beasts do that."

I ran my fingers through my thick hair in perplexity. I had heard similar sentiments voiced in many different ways on Earth, but it was the first time I had ever heard them from the lips of an inhabitant of Almuric. Altha continued in a low detached voice, almost as if she were speaking to herself rather than to me:

"Life is too hard for me. I do not fit, somehow, as the others do. I bruise myself on its rough edges. I look for something that is not and never was."

Uneasy at her strange words, I caught her heavy locks in my hand and forced back her head to look into her face. Her enigmatic eyes met mine with a strange glimmer in them such as I had never seen.

"It was hard before you came," she said. "It is harder now."

Startled, I released her, and she turned her head away.

"Why should I make it harder?" I asked bewilderedly.

"What constitutes life?" she countered. "Is the life we live all there is? Is there nothing outside and beyond our material aspirations?"

I scratched my head in added perplexity.

"Why," I said, "on Earth I met many people who were always following some nebulous dream or ideal, but I never observed that they were happy. On my planet there is much grasping and groping for unseen things, but I never knew there was such full content as I have known on Almuric."

"I thought you different," she said, still looking away from me. "When I saw you lying wounded and in chains, with your smooth skin and strange eyes, I thought you were more gentle than other men. But you are as rough and fierce as the rest. You spend your days and nights in slaying beasts, fighting men, and in riotous wassail."

"But they all do," I protested.

She nodded. "And so I do not fit in life, and were better dead."

I FELT unreasonably ashamed. It had occurred to me that an Earthwoman would find life on Almuric intolerably crude and narrow, but it seemed beyond reason that a native woman would have such feelings. If the other women I had seen desired more superficial gentleness on the part of their men, they had not made it known. They seemed content with shelter and protection, and cheerfully resigned to the rough manners of the males. I sought for words but found none, unskilled as I was in polite discourse. I suddenly felt my roughness, crudity and raw barbarism, and stood abashed.

"I'll take you back to Koth," I said helplessly.

She shrugged her shapely shoulders. "And you can watch my father whip me, if you will."

At that I found my tongue.

"He won't whip you," I retorted angrily. "Let him lay a hand on you, and I'll break his back."

She looked up at me quickly, with eyes widened in sudden interest. My arm had found its way about her slim form, and I was glaring into her eyes, with my face very close to hers. Her lips parted, and had that breathless instant lasted a little longer, I know not what would have happened. But suddenly the color went from her face, and from her parted lips rang a terrible scream. Her gaze was fixed on something beyond and above me, and the thrash of wings suddenly filled the air.

I wheeled on one knee, to see the air above me thronged with dark shapes. The Yagas! The winged men of Almuric! I had half believed them a myth; yet here they were in all their mysterious terror.

I had but a glance as I reared up, clubbing my empty carbine. I saw that they were tall and rangy in build, sinewy and powerful, with ebon skins. They seemed made like ordinary men, except for the great leathery bat-like wings which grew from their shoulders. They were naked except for loin-clouts, and were armed with short curved blades.

I rose on my toes as the first swooped in, simitar lifted, and met him with a swing of my carbine that broke off the stock and crushed his narrow skull like an eggshell. The next instant they were whirling and thrashing about me, their curved blades licking at me like jets of lightning from all sides, the very number of their broad wings hampering them.

Whirling the carbine barrel in a wheel about me, I broke and beat back the flickering blades, and in a furious exchange of strokes, caught another a glancing blow on the head that stretched him senseless at my feet. Then a wild despairing cry rang out behind me, and abruptly the rush slackened.

The whole pack was in the air, racing southward, and I stood frozen. In the arms of one of them writhed and shrieked a slender white figure, stretching out imploring arms to me. Altha! They had snatched her up from behind my back, and were carrying her away to whatever doom awaited her in that black citadel of mystery far to the south. The terrific velocity with which the Yagas raced through the sky was already taking them out of my sight.

As I stood there baffled, I felt a movement at my feet. Looking down I saw one of my victims sit up and feel his head dazedly. I vengefully lifted my carbine barrel to dash out his brains; then a sudden thought struck me, inspired by the ease with which Altha's captor had carried both his weight and hers in the air.

Drawing my poniard, I dragged my captive to his feet. Standing erect he was taller than I, with shoulders equally broad, though his limbs were lean and wiry rather than massive. His dark eyes, which slanted slightly, regarded me with the unblinking stare of a venomous serpent.

The Guras had told me the Yagas spoke a tongue similar to their own.

"You are going to carry me through the air in pursuit of your companions," I said.

He shrugged his shoulders and spoke in a peculiarly harsh voice.

"I cannot carry your weight."

"Then that's bad for you," I answered grimly, and whirling him about, I leaped upon his back, locking my legs about his waist. My left arm was hooked about his neck, the poniard in my right hand pricked his side. He had kept his feet under the impact of my bulk, spreading his great wings.

"Take the air!" I snarled in his ear, sinking the dagger point into his flesh. "Fly, damn you, or I'll cut your heart out!"

His wings began to thrash the air, and we rose slowly from the earth. It was a most sensational experience, but one to which I gave scant thought at the time, being so engrossed in my fury at the abduction of Altha.

WHEN we had risen to a height of about a thousand feet, I looked for the abductors, and saw them far away, a mere group of black dots in the southern sky. After them I steered my reluctant steed.

In spite of my threats and urging for greater speed the flying dots soon vanished. Still I kept on due southward, feeling that even if I failed to overtake them, I would eventually come to the great dusky rock where legend placed their habitation.

Inspired by my poniard, my bearer made good time, considering the burden he was carrying. For hours we sped over the savannas, and by the middle of the afternoon, the landscape changed. We were flying over a forest, the first I had seen on Almuric. The trees seemed to tower to a vast height.

It was near sundown when I saw the farther limits of the forest, and in the grasslands beyond, the ruins of a city. From among these ruins smoke curled upward, and I asked my steed if his companions were cooking their evening meal there. His only answer was a snarl.

We were flying low over the forest, when a sudden uproar caused me to look down. We were just passing over a narrow glade, and in it a terrific battle was taking place. A pack of hyenas had attacked a giant unicorn-like beast, as big as a bison. Half a dozen mangled, trampled bodies attested the fury of the beast's defense, and even as I peered down, he caught the single survivor on his long sword-like ivory horn, and cast it a score of feet in the air, broken and torn.

In the brief fascination of the sight, I must have involuntarily loosened my grasp on my captive. For at that instant, with a convulsive bucking heave and twist, he wrenched free and hurled me sideways. Caught off guard, I clutched vainly at empty air, and rushing earthward, crashed with a stunning impact on the loamy leaf-carpeted earth, directly in front of the maddened unicorn!

I had a dazed brief glimpse of his mountainous bulk looming over me, as his massive lowered head drove his horn at my breast. Then I lurched up on one knee, simultaneously grasping that ivory sword with my left hand and seeking to deflect it, while my right hand drove my poniard up toward the great jugular. Then there came a terrific impact against my skull, and consciousness was blotted out in darkness.

Chapter 6

I COULD have been senseless only a few minutes. When I regained consciousness my first sensation was that of a crushing weight upon my limbs and body. Struggling weakly, I found that I was lying beneath the lifeless body of a unicorn. At the instant my poniard had torn open his great jugular vein, the base of his horn must have struck my head, while the vast body collapsed upon me. Only the soft spongy ground beneath me had saved me from being crushed to a pulp. Working myself out from under that bulk was a herculean task, but eventually I accomplished it, and stood up, bruised and breathless, with the half-dried blood of the monster clotted in my hair and smearing my limbs. I was a grisly sight to look at, but I wasted no time on my appearance. My erstwhile steed was nowhere in evidence, and the circling trees limited my view of the sky.

Selecting the tallest of these trees, I

climbed it as swiftly as possible, and on the topmost branches, looked out over the forest. The sun was setting. I saw that perhaps an hour's swift walk to the south, the forest thinned out and ceased. Smoke still drifted thinly up from the deserted city. And I saw my former captive just dropping down among the ruins. He must have lingered, after he had overthrown me, possibly to see if I showed any signs of life, probably to rest his wings after that long grind.

I cursed; there went my chance of stealing up on them unsuspected. Then I got a surprise. No sooner had the Yaga vanished than he reappeared, shooting up out of the city like a rocket. Without hesitation he raced off southward, speeding through the sky at a rate that left me gaping. What was the reason for his flight? If it had been his companions who were among the ruins, why had he alighted? Perhaps he had found them gone, and was merely following them. Yet his actions seemed strange, considering the leisurely way he had approached the ruins. His flight had the ear-marks of panic.

Shaking my head in puzzlement, I descended the tree and set out for the ruins as swiftly as I could make my way through the dense growth, paying no heed to the rustling in the leaves about me, and the muttering of rousing life, that grew as the shadows deepened.

Night had fallen when I emerged from the forest, but the moon was rising, casting a weird unreal glow over the plains. The ruins glimmered ghostily in the near distance. The walls were not of the rough greenish material used by the Guras. As I approached I saw they were of marble, and that fact caused a vague uneasiness to stir in my mind. I remembered legends told by the Kothans of ruined marble cities haunted by ghoulish beings. Such ruins were found in certain uninhabited places, and none knew their origin.

A brooding silence lay over the broken walls and columns as I entered the ruins. Between the gleaming white tusks and surfaces deep black shadow floated, almost liquid in its quality. From one dusky pool to the other I glided silently, sword in hand, expecting anything from an ambush by the Yagas to an attack by some lurking beast of prey. Utter silence reigned, as I had never encountered it anywhere on Almuric before. Not a distant lion roared, not a night fowl voiced its weird cry. I might have been the last survivor on a dead world.

In silence I came to a great open space, flanked by a circle of broken pillars, which must have been a plaza. Here I halted, motionless, my skin crawling.

IN THE midst of the plaza smoldered the dying coals of a fire over which, on spits planted in the earth, were roasting pieces of meat. The Yagas had evidently built that fire and prepared to sup; but they had not eaten of their meal. They lay strewn about the plaza in a way to appall the hardiest.

I had never gazed on such a scene of organic devastation. Hands, feet, grinning heads, bits of flash, entrails, clots of blood littered the whole plaza. The heads were like balls of blackness, rolled out of the shadows against the snowy marble; their teeth grinned, their eyes glimmered palely in the moonlight. *Something* had come upon the winged men as they sat about their fire and had torn them limb from limb. On the remnants of flesh were the marks of fangs, and some of the bones had been broken, apparently to get the marrow.

A cold ripple went up and down my spine. What animal but man breaks bones in that fashion? But the scattering of the bloody remnants seemed not the work of beasts; it seemed too vindictive, as if it were the work of vengeance, fury or bestial blood-thirstiness.

Where, then, was Altha? Her remains were not among those of her captors. Glancing at the flesh on the spit, the configuration of the pieces set me to shuddering. Shaken with horror, I saw that my dark suspicions were correct. It was parts of a human body the accursed Yagas had been roasting for their meal. Sick with revulsion and dread, I examined the pitiful remnants more closely, and breathed a deep sigh of relief to see the thick muscular limbs of a man, and not the slender parts of a woman. But after that I looked unmoved at the torn bloody bits that had been Yagas.

But where was the girl? Had she escaped the slaughter and hidden herself, or had she been taken by the slayers? Looking about at the towers and fallen blocks and pillars, bathed in the weird moonlight, I was aware of a distinct aura of evil, of lurking menace. I felt the glare of hidden eyes.

But I began casting about the plaza, and came upon a trail of blood drops, lying blackly in the moon, leading through a maze of drunken pillars, and for want of better occupation, I followed it. At least it might lead me to the slayers of the winged men.

I passed under the shadows of leaning pillars which dwarfed my human frame with their brute massiveness, and came into a crumbling edifice, overgrown with lichen. Through the broken roof and the gaping windows the moon poured a fungus-white light that served to make the shadows blacker. But a square of moonlight fell across the entrance of a corridor, and leading into it, I saw the sprinkle of dark clotted drops on the cracked vine-grown marble. Into the corridor I groped, and almost broke my neck on the stairs that lay within. Down them I went, and striking a level, hesitated and was about to retrace my steps when I was electrified by a sound that stopped my heart, and then sent the blood pounding madly through my veins. Through the darkness, faint and far away, sounded the call: *"Esau! Esau Cairn!"*

Altha! Who else could it be? Why should an icy shuddering pass over me, and the short hairs bristle at the back of my neck? I started to answer; then caution clutched my tongue. She could not know I was within hearing, surely. Perhaps she was calling as a frightened child will cry for someone far out of hearing. I went as swiftly down the black tunnel as I dared, in the direction I had heard the cry. And as I went I felt beads of clammy sweat form on my skin, and was gagged by a tendency toward nausea.

My groping hand encountered a doorway and I halted, sensing, as a wild thing does, a living presence of some sort near me. Straining my eyes in the pitch dark, I spoke Altha's name in a low urgent voice. Instantly two lights burned in the darkness, yellowish glows at which I stared for an instant before I realized that they were two eyes. They were broad as my hand, round, and of a scintillance I cannot describe. Behind them I got a vague impression of a huge shapeless bulk. Simultaneously such a wave of instinctive fear swept over me, that I withdrew quickly into the tunnel and hastened along it in the direction I had been going. Back in the cell I heard a faint movement, like the shifting of some great pulpy mass, mingled with a soft rasping sound, as of bristles scraping against stone.

A few score paces more and I halted. The tunnel seemed endless, and besides, judging from the feel, other tunnels branched off from it in the darkness, and I had no way of knowing which was the right one. As I stood there I again heard the call: "Esau! Esau Cairn!"

STEELING myself against something, I knew not what, I set off once more in the direction of the ghostly voice. How far I went I do not know, until I stopped

once more baffled. Then from near by the voice rang out again: "Esau! Esau CairNNNNN!" It rose to a high-pitched note, trailing off into an awful burst of inhuman laughter that froze the blood in my veins.

That was not Altha's voice. I had known all the time that it was not—that it could not be. Yet the alternative was so inexplicable that I had refused to heed what my intuition affirmed and my reason denied.

Now from every direction, on every hand rose a medley of shrill demoniac voices, all shrieking my name with the mockery of devils. The tunnels that had been so silent now rang and re-echoed with strident clamor. I stood bewildered and terrified, as the damned must stand in the clamorous halls of hell. I passed through the stages of icy terror, bewildered horror, desperation, berserk fury. With a maddened roar I plunged blindly at the sounds that seemed nearest, only to collide with a solid wall, while a thousand inhuman voices rose in hideous mirth. Wheeling like a wounded bull, I charged again, this time into the mouth of another tunnel. Racing down this, mad to come to grips with my tormenters, I burst into a vast shadowy space, into which a beam of moonlight cast a ghostly shaft. And again I heard my name called, but in human tones of fear and anguish:

"Esau! Oh, Esau!"

Even as I answered the piteous cry with a savage bellow, I saw her, Altha, etched in the dim moonlight. She was stretched out on the floor, her hands and feet in the shadow. But I saw that at each outstretched member squatted a dim misshapen figure.

With a blood-thirsty yell I charged, and the darkness sprang into nauseous life, flooding my knees with tangible shapes. Sharp fangs gashed me, apish hands clawed at me. They could not halt me. Swinging my sword in great arcs that cut a path through solid masses of writhing shapes, I forged toward the girl that twisted and screamed on the floor in that square of moonlight.

I waded through a rolling, surging mire of squirming biting things that washed about me waist-high, but they could not drag me down. I reached the moonlit square, and the creatures that held Altha gave back before the whistling menace of my sword edge, and the girl sprang up and clung to me. Even as the shadowy horde rolled in to drag us down I saw a crumbling stair leading up, and I thrust her upon it, wheeling to cover her retreat.

It was dark on the stairs, though they led up into a chamber flooded with light through a broken roof. That battle was fought in utter darkness, with only my senses of feeling and hearing to guide my strokes. And it was fought in silence, too, except for my panting, and the whir and crunch of my blade.

UP THAT drunken stair I backed, battling every inch of the way, the skin between my shoulders crawling with the expectancy of an attack from the rear. If they had come upon us from above, we had been lost, but evidently all were below me. What manner of creatures I was fighting I did not know, except that they were taloned and fanged. Otherwise, from the feel of them, they were stunted and misshapen, furry and apish.

When I came out into the chamber above the tunnels I could see little more. The moonlight streaming through the broken roof made only a white shaft in the darkness. I could only make out vague forms in the dimness about me—a heaving, writhing and lashing of shadows, that surged up against me, clawing and tearing, and fell back beneath my lashing sword.

Thrusting Altha behind me, I backed across that shadowy chamber toward a wide rift that showed in the crumbling wall, reeling and stumbling in the whirlpool of

battle that swirled and eddied about me. As I reached the rift through which Altha had already slipped, there was a concerted rush to drag me down. Panic swept over me at the thought of being pulled down in that shadowy room by that dim horde. A blasting burst of fury, a gasping, straining plunge, and I catapulted through the rift, carrying half a dozen attackers with me.

Reeling up, I shook the clinging horrors from my shoulders as a bear might shake off wolves, and bracing my feet slashed right and left. Now for the first time I saw the nature of my foes.

Their bodies were like those of deformed apes, covered with sparse dirty white fur. Their heads were dog-like, with small close-set ears. But their eyes were those of serpents—the same venomous steady lidless stare.

Of all the forms of life I had encountered on that strange planet, none filled me with as much loathing as these dwarfish monstrosities. I backed away from the mangled heap on the earth, as a nauseous flood poured through the rift in the wall.

The effect of those vermin emerging from that broken wall was almost intolerably sickening; the suggestion was that of maggots squirming out of a cracked and bleached skull.

Turning, I caught Altha up in one arm and raced across the open space. They followed fleetly, running now on all fours, and now upright like a man. And suddenly they broke out into their hellish laughter again, and I saw we were trapped. Ahead of me were more emerging from some other subterranean entrance. We were cut off.

A giant pedestal, from which the column had been broken, stood before us. With a bound I reached it, set the girl on the jagged pinnacle, and wheeled on the lower base to take such toll of our pursuers as I might. Blood streaming from a score of gashes trickled down the pedestal on which I stood, and I shook my head violently to rid my eyes of blinding sweat.

They ringed me in a wide semicircle, deliberate now that their prey seemed certain, and I cannot recall a time when I was more revolted by horror and disgust, than when I stood with my back to that marble pillar and faced those verminous monsters of the lower world.

Then my attention was caught by a movement in the shadows under the wall through which we had just come. Something was emerging from the rift—something huge and black and bulky. I caught the glitter of a yellowish spark. Fascinated, I watched, even while the furred devils were closing in. Now the thing had emerged entirely from the rift. I saw it crouching in the shadow of the wall, a squat mass of blackness from which glimmered a pair of yellowish lights. With a start I recognized the eyes I had seen in the subterranean cell.

With a clamor of fiendish yells the furry devils rushed in, and at the same instant the unknown creature ran out into the moonlight with surprising speed and agility. I saw it plainly then—a gigantic spider, bigger than an ox. Moving with the swiftness characteristic of its breed, it was among the dog-heads before the first had felt my lifted sword. An awful scream rose from its first victim, and the rest, turning, broke and fled shrieking in all directions. The monster raged among them with appalling quickness and ferocity. Its huge jaws crunched their skulls, its dripping mandibles skewered them, it crushed their bodies by its sheer weight. In an instant the place was a shambles, inhabited only by the dead and dying. Crouching among its victims, the great black hairy thing fixed its horribly intelligent eyes on me.

I was the one it was trailing. I had awakened it underground, and it had fol-

lowed the scent of the dried blood on my sandals. It had slaughtered the others simply because they stood in its way.

As it crouched on its eight bent legs, I saw that it differed from Earthly spiders not only in size, but in the number of its eyes and the shape of its jaws. Now Altha screamed as it ran swiftly toward me.

But where the fangs and claws of a thousand beast-things were futile against the venom dripping from those black mandibles, the brain and thews of a single man prevailed. Catching up a heavy block of masonry, I poised it for an instant, and then hurled it straight into the onrushing bulk. Full among those branching hairy legs it crushed, and a jet of nauseous green stuff gushed into the air from the torn torso. The monster, halted in his rush, writhed under the pinning stone, cast it aside and staggered toward me again, dragging broken legs, its eyes glittering hellishly. I tore another missile from the crumbling stone, and another and another, raining huge chunks of marble on the writhing horror until it lay still in a ghastly mess of squirming hairy black legs, entrails and blood.

Then, catching Altha in my arms, I raced away through the shadows of monolith and tower and pillar, nor did I halt until the city of silence and mystery lay behind us, and we saw the moon setting across the broad waving grasslands.

NO WORD had passed between us since I had first come upon the girl in that ghoulish tunnel. Now when I looked down to speak to her I saw her dark head drooping against my arm; her white face was upturned, her eyes shut. A quick throb of fear went through me, but a swift examination showed me that she had merely fainted. That fact showed the horror of what she had been through. The women of Koth do not faint easily.

I laid her at full length on the turf, and gazed at her helplessly, noting, as if for the first time, the white firmness of her slender limbs, the exquisite molding of her supple figure. Her dark hair fell in thick glossy clusters about her alabaster shoulders, a strap of her tunic, slipped down, revealed her firm, pink-tipped young breasts. I was aware of a vague unrest that was almost a pain.

Altha opened her eyes and looked up at me. Then her dark eyes flared with terror, and she cried out and clutched at me frantically. My arms closed about her instinctively, and within their iron-thewed clasp I felt the pulsating of her lithe body, the wild fluttering of her heart.

"Don't be afraid," my voice sounded strange, scarcely articulate. "Nothing is going to harm you."

I could feel her heart resuming its normal beat, so closely she clung to me, before her quick pants of fright ceased. But for a while she lay in my arms, looking up at me without speaking, until, embarrassed, I released her and lifted her to a sitting position on the grass.

"As soon as you feel fit," I said, "we'll put more distance between us and—that." I jerked my head in the direction of the distant ruins.

"You are hurt," she exclaimed suddenly, tears filling her eyes. "You are bleeding! Oh, I am to blame. If I had not run away——" She was weeping now in earnest, like any Earthly girl.

"Don't worry about these scratches," I answered, though privately I was wondering if the fangs of the vermin were venomous. "They are only flesh wounds. Stop crying, will you?"

She obediently stifled her sobs, and naïvely dried her eyes with her skirt. I did not wish to remind her of her horrible experience, but I was curious on one point.

"Why did the Yagas halt at the ruins?" I asked. "Surely they knew of the things that haunt such cities."

"They were hungry," she answered with a shudder. "They had captured a youth—they dismembered him alive, but never a cry for mercy they got, only curses. Then they roasted——" she gagged, smitten with nausea.

"So the Yagas are cannibals," I muttered.

"No. They are devils. While they sat about the fire the Dogheads fell upon them. I did not see them until they were on us. They swarmed over the Yagas like jackals over deer. Then they dragged me into the darkness. What they meant to do, Thak only knows. I have heard—but it is too obscene to repeat."

"But why did they shriek my name?" I marveled.

"I cried it aloud in my terror," she answered. "They heard and mimicked me. When you came, they knew you. Do not ask me how. They too are devils."

"This planet is infested with devils," I muttered. "But why did you call on me, in your fright, instead of your father?"

She colored slightly, and instead of answering, began pulling her tunic straps in place.

Seeing that one of her sandals had slipped off, I replaced it on her small foot, and while I was so occupied she asked unexpectedly: "Why do they call you Ironhand? Your fingers are hard, but their touch is as gentle as a woman's. I never had men's fingers touch me so lightly before. More often they have hurt me."

I clenched my fist and regarded it moodily—a knotted iron mallet of a fist. She touched it timidly.

"It's the feeling behind the hand," I answered. "No man I ever fought complained that my fists were gentle. But it is my enemies I wish to hurt, not you."

Her eyes lighted. "You would not hurt me? Why?"

The absurdity of the question left me speechless.

Chapter 7

IT WAS past sunrise when we started back on the long trek toward Koth, swinging far to the west to avoid the devil city from which we had escaped. The sun came up unusually hot. The air was breathless, the light morning wind blew fitfully, and then died down entirely. The always cloudless sky had a faint copperish tint. Altha eyed that sky apprehensively, and in answer to my question said she feared a storm. I had supposed the weather to be always clear and calm and hot on the plains, clear and windy and cold in the hills. Storms had not entered into my calculations.

The beasts we saw shared her uneasiness. We skirted the edge of the forest, for Altha refused to traverse it until the storm had passed. Like most plains-dwellers, she had an instinctive distrust of thick woods. As we strode over the grassy undulations, we saw the herds of grazers milling confusedly. A drove of jumping pigs passed us, covering the ground with gargantuan bounds of thirty and forty feet. A lion started up in front of us with a roar, but dropped his massive head and slunk hurriedly away through the tall grass.

I kept looking for clouds, but saw none. Only the copperish tint about the horizons grew, discoloring the whole sky. It turned from light color to dull bronze, and from bronze to black. The sun smoldered for a little like a veiled torch, veining the dusky dome with fire; then it was blotted out. A tangible darkness seemed to hover an instant in the sky, then rush down, cloaking the world in utter blackness, through which shone neither sun, moon, nor star. I had never guessed how impenetrable darkness could be. I might have been a blind, disembodied spirit wandering through unlighted space, but for the swish of the grasses under my feet, and the soft warm contact of Altha's body against mine. I

began to fear we might fall into a river, or blunder against some equally blind beast of prey.

I had been making for a mass of broken boulders, such a formation as occasionally occurs on the plains. Darkness fell before we reached them, but groping on, I stumbled upon a sizable rock, and placing my back to it, drew Altha against it and stood sheltering her with my body as well as I could. Out on the dark plains breathless silence alternated with the sounds of varied and widespread movement—rustling of grass, shuffle of padded hoofs, weird lowing and low-pitched roaring. Once a vast herd of some sort swept by us, and I was thankful for the protection of the boulders that kept us from being trampled. Again all sounds ceased and the silence was as complete as the darkness. Then from somewhere came a weird howling.

"What's that?" I asked uneasily, unable to classify it.

"The wind!" she shivered, snuggling closer to me.

It did not blow with a steady blast; here and there it swept in mad fitful gusts. Like lost souls it wailed and moaned. It ripped the grasses near us, and finally a puff of it struck us squarely, knocking us off our feet and bruising us against the boulder behind us. Just that one abrupt blast, like a buffet from an unseen giant's fist.

As we regained our feet I froze. Something was passing near our refuge—something mountain-huge, beneath whose tread the earth trembled. Altha caught me in a desperate clutch, and I felt the pounding of her heart. My hair prickled with nameless fear. The *thing* was even with us. It halted, as if sensing our presence. There was a curious leathery sound, as of the movement of great limbs. Something waved in the air above us; then I felt a touch on my elbow. The same object touched Altha's bare arm, and she screamed, her taut nerves snapping.

Instantly our ears were deafened by an awful bellow above us, and something swept down through the darkness with a clashing of gigantic teeth. Blindly I lashed out and upward, feeling my sword-edge meet tangible substance. A warm liquid spurted along my arm, and with another terrible roar, this time more of pain than rage, the invisible monster shambled away, shaking the earth with its tread, dimming the shrieking wind with its bellowing.

"WHAT was it, in God's name?" I panted.

"It was one of the Blind Ones," she whispered. "No man has ever seen them; they dwell in the darkness of the storm. Whence they come, whither they go, none knows. But look, the darkness melts."

"Melts" was the right word. It seemed to shred out, to tear in long streamers. The sun came out, the sky showed blue from horizon to horizon. But the earth was barred fantastically with long strips of darkness, tangible shadows floating on the plain, with broad spaces of sunlight between. The scene might have been a dream landscape of an opium-eater. A hurrying deer flitted across a sunlight band and vanished abruptly in a broad streamer of black; as suddenly it flashed into light and sight again. There was no gradual shading into darkness; the borders of the torn strips of blackness were as clear-cut and definite as ribbons of ebony on a background of gold and emerald. As far as I could see, the world was stripped and barred with those black ribbons. Sight could not pierce them, but they were thinning, dividing, vanishing.

Directly before me one of the streamers of darkness ripped apart and disappeared, revealing the figure of a man—a hairy giant, who stood glaring at me, sword in hand, as surprised as I. Then several things happened all at once. Altha screamed: "A Thugran!"; the stranger

leaped and slashed, and his sword clanged on my lifted blade.

I have only a brief chaotic memory of the next few seconds. There was a whirl of strokes and parries, a brief clanging of steel; then my sword-point sank under his heart and stood out behind his back. I wrenched the blade free as he sank down, and stood glaring down at him bewilderedly. I had secretly wondered what the outcome would be when I was called upon to face a seasoned warrior with naked steel. Now it had occurred and was over with, and I was absolutely unable to remember how I had won. It had been too fast and furious for conscious thought; my fighting instinct had acted for me.

A clamor of angry cries burst on me, and wheeling I saw a score of hairy warriors swarming out from among the rocks. It was too late to flee. In an instant they were on me, and I was the center of a whirling, flashing maelstrom of swords. How I parried them even for a few seconds I cannot say. But I did, and even had the satisfaction of feeling my blade grate around another, and sever the wielder's shoulder-bone. A moment later one stooped beneath my thrust and drove the spear through the calf of my leg. Maddened by the pain, I dealt him a stroke that split his skull to the chin, and then a carbine stock descended on my head. I partially parried the blow, else it had smashed my skull. But even so, it beat down on my crown with murderous impact, and the lights went out.

I came to with the impression that I was lying in a small boat which was rocking and tossing in a storm. Then I discovered that I was bound hand and foot, and being borne on a litter made of spear-shafts. Two huge warriors were bearing me between them, and they made no effort to make the traveling any easier for me. I could see only the sky, the hairy back of the warrior in front of me, and by drawing back my head the bearded face of the warrior behind. This person, seeing my eyes open, growled a word to his mate, and they promptly dropped the litter. The jolt set my damaged head to throbbing, and the wound in my leg to hurting abnominably.

"Logar!" bawled one of them. "The dog is conscious. Make him walk, if you must bring him to Thugra. I've carried him far as I'm going to."

I heard footsteps, and then above me towered a giant form and a face that seemed familiar. It was a fierce, brutal face, and from the corner of the snarling mouth to the rim of the square jaw, ran a livid scar.

"Well, Esau Cairn," said this individual, "we meet again."

I made no reply to this obvious comment.

"What?" he sneered, "do you not remember Logar the Bonecrusher, you hairless dog?"

He punctuated his remarks by a savage kick in my ribs. Somewhere there rang out a feminine shriek of protest, the sound of a scuffle, and Altha broke through the ring of warriors and fell to her knees beside me.

"Beast!" she cried, her beautiful eyes blazing. "You kick him when he is helpless, when you would not dare face him in fair battle."

"Who let this Kothan cat loose?" roared Logar. "Thal, I told you to keep her away from this dog."

"She bit my hand," snarled the big warrior, striding forward and shaking a drop of blood from his hairy paw. "I'd as soon try to hold a spitting wildcat."

"Well, haul him to his feet," directed Logar. "He walks the rest of the way."

"But he is wounded in the leg!" wailed Altha. "He cannot walk."

"Why don't you finish him here?" demanded one of the warriors.

"Because that would be too easy!" roared Logar, red lights flickering in his blood-shot eyes. "The thief struck me foully with a stone, from behind, and stole my poniard"—here I saw that he was wearing it once more at his girdle. "He shall go to Thugra, and there I'll take my time about killing him. Drag him up!"

THEY loosened my legs, none too gently, but the wounded one was so stiff I could hardly stand, much less walk. They encouraged me with blows, kicks, and prods from spears and swords, while Altha wept in helpless fury, and at last turned on Logar.

"You are both a liar and a coward!" she screamed. "He did not strike you with a stone—he beat you down with his naked fists, as all men know, though your miserable slaves dare not acknowledge it——"

Logar's knotty fist crashed against her jaw, knocking her off her feet, to fall in a crumpled heap a dozen feet away. She lay without moving, blood trickling from her lips. Logar grunted in savage satisfaction, but his warriors were silent. Moderate corporal correction for women was not unknown among the Guras, but such excessive and wanton brutality was repugnant to any warrior of average decency. So Logar's braves looked glum, though they made no verbal protest.

As for me, I went momentarily blind with the red madness of fury that swept over me. With a blood-thirsty snarl I jerked convulsively, upsetting the two men who held me; so we all went down in a heap. The other Thugrans came and boosted us up, glad to vent their outraged feelings on my carcass, which they did lustily, with sandal heels and sword-hilts. But I did not feel the blows that rained upon me. The whole world was swimming red to my sight, and speech had utterly failed me. I could only snarl bestially as I tore in vain at the thongs which bound me. When I lay exhausted, my captors hauled me up and began beating me to make me walk.

"You can beat me to death," I snarled, finding my voice at last, "but I won't move until some of you see to the girl."

"The slut's dead," growled Logar.

"You lie, you dog!" I spat. "You miserable weakling, you couldn't hit hard enough to kill a new-born babe!"

Logar bellowed in wordless fury, but one of the others, panting from his exertions of hammering me, stepped over to Altha, who was showing signs of life.

"Let her lie!" roared Logar.

"Go to the devil!" snarled his warrior. "I love her no more than you do, but if bringing her along will make that smooth-skinned devil walk of his own accord, I'll bring her, if I have to carry her all the way. He's not human; I've pummeled him till I'm ready to drop dead, and he's in better shape than I."

So Altha, wobbly on her legs and very groggy, accompanied us as we marched to Thugra.

WE WERE on the road several days, during which time walking was agony to my wounded leg. Altha persuaded the warriors to let her bandage my wounds, and but for that I very probably should have died. I was marked in many places by the gashes received in the haunted ruins, battered and bruised from head to foot by the beating the Thugrans gave me. Just enough food and water was given me to keep me alive. And so, dazed, weary, harassed by thirst and hunger, crippled, stumbling along over those endless rolling plains, I was even glad at last to see the walls of Thugra looming in the distance, even though I knew they spelled my doom. Altha had not been badly treated on the march, but she had been prevented from giving me aid and comfort, beyond bandaging my wounds, and all through the

nights, waking from the beast-like sleep of utter exhaustion, I heard her sobbing. Among the hazy, tortured impressions of that dreary trek, that stands out most clearly —Altha sobbing in the night, terrible with loneliness and despair in the immensity of shadowed world and moaning darkness.

And so we came to Thugra. The city was almost exactly like Koth—the same huge tower-flanked gates, massive walls built of rugged green stone, and all. The people, too, differed none in the main essentials from the Kothans. But I found that their government was more like an absolute monarchy than was Koth's. Logar was a primitive despot, and his will was the last power. He was cruel, merciless, lustful and arrogant. I will say this for him: he upheld his rule by personal strength and courage. Thrice during my captivity in Thugra I saw him kill a rebellious warrior in hand-to-hand combat—once with his naked hands against the other's sword. Despite his faults, there was force in the man, a gusty, driving, dynamic power that beat down opposition with sheer brutality. He was like a roaring wind, bending or breaking all that stood before him.

Possessed of incredible vitality, he was intensely vain of his physical prowess—in which, I believe, his superiority of personality was rooted. That was why he hated me so terribly. That was why he lied to his people and told them that I struck him with a stone. That was why, too, he refused to put the matter to test. In his heart lurked fear—not of any bodily harm I might do him, but fear lest I overcome him again, and discredit him in the eyes of his subjects. It was his vanity that made a beast of Logar.

I was confined in a cell, chained to the wall. Logar came every day to curse and taunt me. It was evident that he wished to exhaust all mental forms of torment before he proceeded to physical torture. I did not know what had become of Altha. I had not seen her since first we entered the city. He swore that he had taken her to his palace, and described to me with great detail the salacious indignities to which he swore he subjected her. I did not believe him, for I felt he would be more likely to bring her to my cell and torture her before me. But the fury into which his obscene narrations threw me could not have been much more violent if the scenes he described had been enacted before me.

It was easy to see that the Thugrans did not relish Logar's humor, for they were no worse than other Guras, and all Guras possess, as a race, an innate decency in regard to women But Logar's power was too complete for any to venture a protest. At last, however, the warrior who brought me food told me that Altha had disappeared immediately after we reached the city, and that Logar was searching for her, but unable to find her. Apparently she had either escaped from Thugra, or was hiding somewhere in the city.

And so the slow days crawled by.

Chapter 8

IT WAS midnight when I awoke suddenly. The torch in my cell was flickering and guttering. The guard was gone from my door. Outside, the night was full of noise. Curses, yells and shots mingled with the clash of steel, and over all rose the screaming of women. This was accompanied by a curious thrashing sound in the air above. I tore at my bonds, mad to know what was happening. There was fighting in the city, beyond the shadow of a doubt, but whether civil war or alien invasion, I could not know.

Then quick light steps sounded outside, and Altha ran swiftly into my cell. Her hair was in wild disorder, her scanty garment torn, her eyes ablaze with terror.

"Esau!" she cried. "Doom from the sky

has fallen on Thugra! The Yagas have descended on the city by the thousands! There is fighting in the streets and on the house tops—the gutters are running red, and the streets are strewn with corpses! Look! The city is burning!"

Through the high-set barred windows I saw a smoldering glow. Somewhere sounded the dry crackling of flames. Altha was sobbing as she fumbled vainly at my bonds. That day Logar had begun the physical torture, and had had me hauled upright and suspended from the roof by a rawhide thong bound about my wrists, my toes just touching a huge block of granite. But Logar had not been so wise. They had used a new thong of hide, and it had stretched, allowing my feet to rest on the block, in which position I had suffered no unbearable anguish, and had even fallen asleep, though naturally the attitude was not inducive to great comfort.

As Altha worked futilely to free me, I asked her where she had been, and she answered that she had slipped away from Logar when we had reached the city, and that kind women, pitying her, had hidden and fed her. She had been waiting for an opportunity to aid me in escaping. "And now," she wailed, wringing her hands, "I can do nothing! I cannot untie this wretched noose!"

"Go find a knife!" I directed. "Quick!"

Even as she turned, she cried out and shrank back, trembling, as a terrible figure lurched through the door.

It was Logar, his mane and beard matted and singed, the hair on his great breast crisped and blackened, blood streaming from his limbs. His bloodshot eyes glared madness as he reeled toward me, lifting the poniard I had taken from him so long before.

"Dog!" he croaked. "Thugra is doomed! The winged devils drop from the skies like vultures on a dead ox! I have slain until I die of weariness, yet still they come. But I remembered you. I could not rest easy in Hell, knowing you still lived. Before I go forth again to die, I'll send you before me!"

Altha shrieked and ran to shield me, but he was before her. Rising on his toes he caught at my girdle, lifting the poniard on high. And as he did so, I drove my knee with terrific force up against his jaw. The impact must have broken his bull-neck like a twig. His shaggy head shot back between his shoulders, his bearded chin pointing straight up. He went down like a slaughtered ox, his head crashing hard on the stone floor.

A low laugh sounded from the doorway. Etched in the opening stood a tall ebony shape, wings half lifted, a dripping simitar in a crimsoned hand. Limned in the murky red glare behind him, the effect was that of a black-winged demon standing in the flame-lit door of Hell. The passionless eyes regarded me enigmatically, flitted across the crumpled form on the floor, then rested on Altha, cowering at my feet.

Calling something over his shoulder, the Yaga advanced into the room, followed by a score of his kind. Many of them bore wounds, and their swords were notched and dripping.

"Take them," the first comer indicated Altha and myself.

"Why the man?" demurred one.

"Who ever saw a white man with blue eyes before? He will interest Yasmeena. But be careful. He has the thews of a lion."

One of them grasped Altha's arm and dragged her away, struggling vainly and twisting her head to stare back at me with terrified eyes, and the others from a safe distance cast a silken net about my feet. While my limbs were so enmeshed, they seized me, bound me with silken cords that a lion could not have broken, and cut the thong by which I was suspended. Then two of them lifted me and bore me out of

the cell. We emerged into a scene of frenzy in the streets.

The stone walls were of course immune to flame, but the woodwork of the buildings was ablaze. Smoke rolled up in great billowing clouds, shot and veined by tongues of flame, and against this murky background black shapes twisted and contorted like figments of nightmare. Through the black clouds shot what appeared to be blazing meteors, until I saw they were winged men bearing torches.

In the streets, among falling sparks and crashing walls, in the burning buildings, on the roofs, desperate scenes were being hideously enacted. The men of Thugra were fighting with the fury of dying panthers. Any one of them was more than a match for a single Yaga, but the winged devils far outnumbered them, and their fiendish agility in the air balanced the superior strength and courage of the apemen. Swooping down through the air, they slashed with their curved swords, soaring out of reach again before the victim could return the stroke. When three or four devils were striking thus at a single enemy, the butchery was certain and swift. The smoke did not seem to bother them as it did their human adversaries. Some, perched on points of vantage, bent bows and sent arrows singing down into the struggling masses in the streets.

The killing was not all on one side. Winged bodies as well as hairy shapes lay strewn in the blood-splashed streets. Carbines cracked and more than a few flying fiends crashed earthward in a frantic thrashing of wings. Madly lashing swords found their target, and when the desperate hands of a Gura closed on a Yaga, that Yaga died horribly.

But by far the greater slaughter was among the Thugrans. Blinded and half strangled, most of their bullets and arrows went wild. Outnumbered and bewildered by the hawk-like tactics of their merciless foes, they fought vainly, were cut down or feathered with arrows.

The main object of the Yagas seemed to be women captives. Again and again I saw a winged man soar up through the whirling smoke, gripping a shrieking girl in his arms.

Oh, it was a sickening sight! I do not believe that the utter barbarism and demoniac cruelty of the scene could be duplicated on Earth, vicious as its inhabitants can be at times. It was not like humans fighting humans, but like members of two different forms of life at war, utterly without sympathy or any common plane of understanding.

But the massacre was not complete. The Yagas were quitting the city they had ruined, sweeping up into the skies laden with naked writhing captives. The survivors still held the streets, and fired blindly at the departing victors, evidently preferring to risk killing their captives rather than to let them be carried to the fate that awaited them.

I saw a knot of perhaps a hundred struggling fighters slashing and gasping on the highest roof in the city, the Yagas to tear away and escape, the Guras to drag them down. Smoke billowed about them, flames caught at their hair; then with a thunderous roar the roof fell in, bearing victors and vanquished alike to a fiery death. The deafening thunder of the devouring flames was in my ears as my captors whirled me through the air away from the reeking city of Thugra.

When my dazed faculties adjusted themselves sufficiently for me to take note of my surroundings, I found myself sailing through the sky at terrific speed, while below, above and about me sounded the steady beat of mighty wings. Two Yagas were bearing me with perfect ease, and I was in the midst of the band, which was flying southward in a wedge-shaped formation, like that of wild geese. There were

fully ten thousand of them. They darkened the morning sky, and their gigantic shadow swept over the plain beneath them as the sun rose.

We were flying at an altitude of about a thousand feet. Many of the winged men bore girls and young women, and carried them with an ease that spoke of incredible wing-power. No match in sheer muscularity for the Guras, yet those winged devils have unbelievable powers of endurance in the air. They can fly for hours at top speed, and in the wedge formation, with unburdened leaders cleaving the air ahead of them, can carry weights almost equal their own at almost the same velocity.

We did not pause to rest or eat until nightfall, when our captors descended to the plain, where they built fires and spent the night. That night lives in my memory as one of the greatest horrors I have ever endured. We captives were given no food, but the Yagas ate. And their food was their miserable captives. Lying helpless, I shut my eyes to that butchery, wished that I were deaf that I might not hear the heart-rending cries. The butchery of men I can endure, in battle, even in red massacre. The wanton slaughter of helpless women who can only shriek for mercy until the knife silences their wails, that is more than I can stand. Nor did I know but that Altha was among those chosen for the grisly feast. With each hiss and crunch of the beheading blade I winced, seeing in fancy her lovely dark head roll on the blood-soaked ground. For what was going on at the other fires I could not know.

After it was over and the gorged demons lay about the fires in slumber, I lay sick at heart, listening to the roaring of the prowling lions, and reflecting how kinder and more gentle is any beast, than any thing molded in the form of man. And out of my sick horror grew a hate that steeled me for whatever might come, in the grim determination to ultimately repay these winged monsters for all the suffering they had inflicted.

DAWN was only a hint in the sky when we took the air again. There was no morning meal. I was to learn that the Yagas ate only at intervals, gorging themselves to capacity every few days. After several hours hurtling over the usual grasslands, we came suddenly in sight of a broad river spanning the savannas from horizon to horizon, fringed on the northern bank by a narrow belt of forest. The waters were of a curious purple, glimmering like watered silk. On the farther bank appeared a tall thin tower of a black shiny material that glittered like polished steel.

As we whirled over the river I saw that it was rushing with terrific velocity. Its roar came up to us, and I saw the seething of eddying whirlpools in its racing current. Crossing the stream at the point where the tower stood, reared numbers of huge stones, among which the waters foamed and thundered. Looking down at the tower, I saw half a dozen winged men on the battlemented roof, who tossed up their arms as if hailing our captors. From the river southward stretched desert—bare, dusty, grayish, strewn occasionally with bleached bones here and there. Far away on the horizon I saw a giant black bulk growing in the sky.

It stood out boldly as we raced toward it. In a few hours we had reached it, and I was able to make out all its details. It was a gigantic block of black basalt-like rock rising sheer out of the desert, a broad river flowing about its feet, its summit crowned with black towers, minarets and castles. It was no myth, then, but a fantastic reality — Yugga, the Black City, the stronghold of the winged people.

The river, cutting through the naked desert, split on that great rock and passed about it on either side, forming a natural moat. On every side but one the waters

lapped the sheer wall of the cliffs. But on one side a broad beach had been formed, and there stood another town. Its style of architecture was very different from that of the edifices on the rock. The houses were mere stone huts, squat, flat-roofed, and one-storied. Only one building had any pretensions—a black temple-like edifice built against the cliff wall. This lower town was protected by a strong stone wall built about it at the water's edge, and connecting at each end with the cliff behind the town.

I saw the inhabitants, and saw that they were neither Yagas nor Guras. They were short and squat of build, and of a peculiar blue color. Their faces, while more like those of Earthly humans than were those of the Gura males, lacked the intelligence of the latter. The countenances were dull, stupid and vicious, the women being little more prepossessing than the men. I saw these curious people, not only in their town at the foot of the cliff, but at work in fields along the river.

I had little opportunity for observing them, however, since the Yagas swept straight up to the citadel, which towered five hundred feet above the river. I was bewildered by the array of battlements, pinnacles, minarets and roof gardens that met my gaze, but got the impression that the city on the rock was built like one huge palace, each part connected with the rest. Figures lounging on couches on the flat roofs lifted themselves on elbow, and from scores of casements the faces of women looked at us as we sank down on a broad flat roof that was something like a landing-field. There many of the winged men dispersed, leaving the captives guarded by three or four hundred warriors, who herded them through a gigantic door. There were about five hundred of these wretched girls, Altha among them. I was carried, still bound, along with them. By this time my whole body was numb from having circulation cut off so long, but my mind was intensely active.

We traversed a stairway down which half a dozen elephants could have stalked abreast, and came into a corridor of corresponding vastness. Walls, stair, ceiling and floor were all of the gleaming black stone, which I decided had been cut out of the rock on which Yugga was built, and highly polished. So far I had seen no carvings, tapestries, or any attempt at ornamentation; yet it could not be denied that the effect of those lofty walls and vaulted ceilings of polished ebony was distinctly one of splendor. There was an awe-inspiring majesty about the architecture which seemed incongruous, considering the beastliness of the builders. Yet the tall black figures did not seem out of place, moving somberly through those great ebony halls. The Black City—not alone because its walls were dusky-hued did humans give it that sinister name.

As we passed through those lofty halls I saw many of the inhabitants of Yugga. Besides the winged men, I saw, for the first time, the women of the Yaggas. Theirs was the same lithe build, the same glossy black skin, the same faintly hawk-like cast of countenance. But the women were not winged. They were clad in short silken skirts held up with jewel-crusted girdles, and in filmy sashes bound about their breasts. But for the almost intangible cruelty of their faces, they were beautiful. Their dusky features were straight and clear-cut, their hair was not kinky.

I saw other women, hundreds of the black-haired, white-skinned daughters of the Guras. But there were others: small, dainty, yellow-skinned girls, and copper-colored women—all, apparently, slaves to the black people. These women were something new and unexpected. All the fantastic forms of life I had encountered so far had been mentioned in tales or legends of the Kothans. The Dogheads, the giant

spider, the winged people with their black citadel and their blue-skinned slaves—all these had been named in legendry, at least. But no man or woman of Koth had ever spoken of women with yellow or copper skins. Were these exotic prisoners from another planet, just as I was from an alien world?

While meditating the matter I was carried through a great bronze portal at which stood a score of winged warriors on guard, and found myself with the captive girls in a vast chamber, octagonal in shape, the walls hung with dusky tapestries. It was carpeted with some sort of rich fur-like stuff, and the air was heavy with perfumes and incense.

TOWARD the back of the chamber, broad steps of beaten gold led up to a fur-covered dais, on which lounged a young black woman. She alone, of all the Yaga women, was winged. She was dressed like the rest, wearing no ornaments except her gem-crusted girdle, from which jutted a jeweled dagger-hilt. Her beauty was marvelous and disquieting, like the beauty of a soulless statue. I sensed that of all the inhuman denizens of Yugga, she was least human. Her brooding eyes spoke of dreams beyond the boundaries of human consciousness. Her face was the face of a goddess, knowing neither fear nor mercy.

Ranged about her couch in attitudes of humility and servitude were twenty naked girls, white, yellow and copper-skinned.

The leader of our captors advanced toward the royal dais, and bowing low, at the same time extending his hands, palms down and fingers spread wide, he said: "Oh, Yasmeena, Queen of the Night, we bring you the fruits of conquest."

She raised herself on her elbow, and as her terribly impersonal gaze passed over her cringing captives, a shudder swept across their ranks as a wind passes over rows of wheat. From earliest childhood Gura girls were taught, by tales and tradition, that the worst fate that could befall them was to be captured by the people of the Black City. Yugga was a misty land of horror, ruled by the arch-fiend Yasmeena. Now those trembling girls were face to face with the vampire herself. What wonder that many of them fainted outright?

But her eyes passed over them and rested on me, where I stood propped up between a couple of warriors. I saw interest grow in those dark luminous eyes, and she spoke to the chief:

"Who is that barbarian, whose skin is white, yet almost as hairless as ours, who is clad like a Gura, and yet unlike them?"

"We found him a captive among the Thugrans, oh mistress of Night," he answered. "Your majesty shall herself question him. And now, oh dark beauty, be pleased to designate the miserable wenches who shall serve your loveliness, that the rest may be apportioned among the warriors who made the raid."

Yasmeena nodded, her eyes still on me, and with a few waves of her hand she indicated a dozen or so of the handsomest girls, among these being Altha. They were drawn aside, and the rest were herded out.

Yasmeena eyed me a space without speaking, and then said to him who appeared to be her major-domo: "Gotrah, this man is weary and stained with travel and captivity, and there is an unhealed wound in his leg. The sight of him, as he now is, offends me. Take him away, let him bathe and eat and drink, and let his leg be bandaged. Then bring him to me again."

So my captors, with a weary sigh, heaved me up again, and carried me from the royal chamber, down a winding corridor, along a flight of stairs, and halted finally in a chamber where a fountain bubbled in the floor. There they fastened gold chains to my wrists and ankles, and

then cut the cords that bound me. In the excruciating pain of the returning circulation, I scarcely noticed when they splashed me in the fountain, bathing the sweat, dirt and dried blood from my limbs and body, and clad me in a new loin-cloth of scarlet silk. They likewise dressed the wound in my calf, and then a copper-skinned slave-girl entered with gold vessels of food. I would not touch the meat, what of my grisly suspicions, but I ate ravenously of the fruit and nuts, and drank deeply of a green wine which I found most delicious and refreshing.

After that I felt so drowsy that I sank down on a velvet couch and passed instantly into deep slumber, from which I was roused by someone shaking me. It was Gotrah bending over me with a short knife in his hand; and, all my wild instincts aroused, I did my best to brain him with my clenched fist, and failed only because of the chain on my wrist. He recoiled, cursing.

"I have not come to cut your throat, barbarian," he snapped, "though nothing would please me better. The Kothan girl has told Yasmeena that it is your habit to scrape the hair from your face, and it is the Queen's desire to see you thus. Here, take this knife and scrape yourself. It has no point, and I will be careful to stay out of your reach. Here is a mirror."

STILL half asleep—by which I believe the green wine was drugged, though for what reason I cannot say—I propped the silver mirror up against the wall, and went to work on my beard, which had reached no mean proportions during my captivities. It was a dry shave, but my skin is as durable as tanned leather, and the knife had an edge keener than I ever found on an Earthly razor. When I had finished, Gotrah grunted at my changed appearance and demanded the knife again. As there was no point in retaining it, it being useless as a weapon, I threw it at him, and immediately fell asleep again.

The next time I awoke naturally, and rising, took in my surroundings more minutely. The chamber was unadorned, furnished only with the couch, a small ebony table, and a fur-covered bench. There was a single door, which was closed and doubtless bolted on the outside, and one window. My chains were fastened to a gold ring in the wall behind the couch, but the strand that linked me to it was long enough to allow me to take a few steps, to the fountain, and to the window. This window was barred with gold, and I looked out over flat roofs, at towers and minarets which limited my view.

So far the Yagas had treated me well enough; I wondered how Altha was faring, and if the position of member of the Queen's retinue carried any special privileges or safety.

Then Gotrah entered again, with half a dozen warriors, and they unlocked my chain from the wall and escorted me down the corridor, up the winding stair. I was not taken back to the great throne chamber, but to a smaller room high up in a tower. This room was so littered with furs and cushions that it was almost stuffed. I was reminded of the soft, padded nest of a spider, and the black spider was there—lounging on a velvet couch and staring at me with avid curiosity. This time she was not attended by slaves. The warriors chained me to the wall—every wall in that accursed palace seemed to have rings for captives—and left us alone.

I leaned back among the furs and pillows, finding their downy contact irksome to my iron-hard frame, unaccustomed to soft living of any kind, and for a wearisome time the Queen of Yugga surveyed me without speaking. Her eyes had a hypnotic quality; I distinctly felt their impact. But I felt too much like a chained beast on exhibition to be aware of any feeling but one

of rising resentment. I fought it down. A burst of berserk fury might break the slender chains that held me, and rid the world of Yasmeena, but Altha and I would still be prisoners on that accursed rock from which legend said there was no escape save through the air.

"WHO are you?" Yasmeena demanded abruptly. "I have seen men with skins smoother even than yours, but never a hairless white man before."

Before I could ask her where she had seen hairless men, if not among her own people, she continued: "Nor have I seen eyes like yours. They are like a deep cold lake, yet they blaze and smolder like the cold blue flame that dances forever above Xathar. What is your name? Whence come you? The girl Altha said you came out of the wilderness and dwelt in her city, defeating its mighty men in single combat. But she does not know from what land you came, she says. Speak, and do not lie."

"I'll speak but you'll think I lie," I grunted. "I am Esau Cairn, whom the men of Koth call Ironhand. I come from another world in another solar system. Chance, or the whim of a scientist whom you would call a magician, cast me on this planet. Chance again threw me among the Kothans. Chance carried me to Yugga. Now I have spoken. Believe me or not, as you will."

"I believe you," she answered. "Of old, men passed from star to star. There are beings now which traverse the cosmos. I would study you. You shall live—for a while, at least. But you must wear those chains, for I read the fury of the beast in your eyes, and know you would rend me if you could."

"What of Altha?" I asked.

"Well, what of her?" She seemed surprised at the question.

"What have you done with her?" I demanded.

"She will serve me with the rest, until she displeases me. Why do you speak of another woman, when you are talking to me? I am not pleased."

Her eyes began to glitter. I never saw eyes like Yasmeena's. They changed with every shift of mood and whim, and they mirrored passions and angers and desires beyond the maddest dreams of humanity.

"You do not blench," she said softly. "Man, do you know what it is for Yasmeena to be displeased? Then blood flows like water, Yugga rings with screams of agony, and the very gods hide their heads in horror."

The way she said it turned my blood cold, but the red anger of the primitive would not down. The feel of my strength came upon me, and I knew that I could tear that golden ring from the stone and rip out her life before she could leap from her couch, if it came to that. So I laughed, and my laughter thrummed with bloodlust. She started up and eyed me closely.

"Are you mad, to laugh?" she asked. "No, that was not mirth—it was the growl of a hunting leopard. It is in your mind to leap and kill me, but if you do, the girl Altha will suffer for your crime. Yet you interest me. No man has ever laughed at me before. You shall live—for a while." She clapped her hands and the warriors entered. "Take him back to his chamber," she directed. "Keep him chained there until I send for him again."

And so began my third captivity on Almuric, in the black citadel of Yugga, on the rock Yuthla, by the river of Yogh, in the land of Yagg.

This story rises in a crescendo of sheer fantastic horror in the stirring chapters that bring the tale to its thriling conclusion in the next issue of WEIRD TALES. *We suggest that you reserve your copy at your magazine dealer's now.*

Taylor uttered a sort of croak. "Stop that!" he bellowed.

Headache

By PAUL ERNST

A brief tale about a strange power that was given to Augustus Taylor—a power that he was glad to part with

SUCH WORDS! From such a person! They almost knocked Augustus Taylor out of his chair.

They'd have been startling enough in the sanctity of his office even if there had been someone around from whom you might expect such language—a shop mechanic, say, instead of pale, demure Miss Plummer sitting beside his desk.

He hadn't been paying much attention to her. He had been staring at her, but abstractedly, not thinking of her at all. He had been thinking of the curious little ache in his head that had started a moment ago. A queer thing, as sudden as though a small switch had been snapped in the middle of his skull. Snap. Then the ache. Deep down inside his head. Nothing to

worry about; nothing to stop work for; nothing serious; but the most peculiar little ache he had ever experienced.

And then the words, incredibly, from prim Miss Plummer, waiting to take dictation.

"Fat old fool!"

Augustus Taylor's gaze focussed in incredulous attention on her face instead of merely in her general direction; on that long, horsy face which displayed about as much sex appeal and recklessness as an 1890 hymn-book.

"Miss Plummer!" he gasped. "What was that you said?"

"I beg your pardon?" She was positively gaping at him. Even her teeth looked prim and secretive, just peeping from the edges of prim, pale lips.

"I said, what was that you called me?"

"Why, I didn't call you anything, Mr. Taylor. I didn't say a thing."

And then Augustus Taylor realized that she *hadn't* said anything. He had been watching her, however inattentively, and he could remember that her lips had not moved. Yet he had distinctly heard those words. Fat old f——

"You're sure you didn't say anything?"

"Of course I'm sure, Mr. Taylor." She looked at him out of pale, correct eyes. Incredibly, even her eyes looked bony, plated with armored virtue.

Taylor cleared his throat. "I——" he began.

"You *are* a fat old fool, you know."

There! He'd heard it again. And from Miss Plummer. It had to be from her. There was no one else in the little private office.

"Miss Plummer!"

Miss Plummer got to her feet. There was annoyance inlaid with alarm on her long features.

"What *is* the matter, Mr. Taylor? Don't you feel well? Shall I get you an aspirin or something?"

Taylor touched his forehead with his handkerchief, for he was realizing again that Miss Plummer's lips hadn't moved when he'd thought to hear the repeated outrage against his dignity. Damn the woman! Was she a ventriloquist or something?

"No. I feel all right,' he mumbled. "But I won't dictate for a little while. You can go. I'll ring when I want you."

She went out, looking perplexed and a little afraid, which was not unnatural. Taylor himself felt precisely the way she looked, with fear having the edge on perplexity. What the devil was the matter with him? Was he going nuts? But he had distinctly heard those words. And there had been no one else to speak them. . . .

HE WENT to the window and peered out. It was three floors down the straight side of his brick factory to the cement walk. No one could have been hanging out there to whisper the words. He went to the door of his little washroom and opened it. Empty. Yet he had heard——

He went back to his desk and sat down, staring unseeingly at a stack of shop records of the conduct of the gray-metal gear and pulley-wheel business. The queer little ache was still with him, deep down in the center of his skull. Not very noticeable; not distracting enough to take his mind off the impossible thing that had just occurred.

His door opened and his partner, Alex Healy, came in. Healy was as thin and dour as Augustus was plump and, normally, breezy. Alex handled the finance and production. Augustus took care of sales and contact.

" 'Morning, Augustus," said Healy. "Why don't you die and let somebody run this business that knows how to handle it?"

"What?" said Taylor.

Alex stopped halfway from the door to the desk.

"I said 'good morning'," he said, lips parted a little, dark eyes puzzled. "What's there about that to make you jump?"

Taylor sank back into his chair with something like panic in his heart. "Good morning" was all his partner had said. His mind told him that. Alex's mouth had moved with those two words—and that was all.

But the rest of the words, about dying and letting somebody run the business who knew how—hang it, he'd heard that too.

"What's on your mind?" he asked, in a voice that wasn't quite his own.

"Just wanted to remind you of the meeting with Proctor this noon," Healy said. "Lunch, you know."

Taylor nodded. He had lain awake over that appointment. Proctor wanted the Taylor-Healy Gray-Metal Company to work exclusively on parts for the Proctor Motor Corporation. No more sales expense. Contact with only one giant customer. Machines set to make only the Proctor-type gears. Took a lot of grief out of business, but it was rather dangerous. One-customer companies took it on the chin if the one customer got picky.

"I'll be on tap," he said to Healy.

They talked the Proctor thing over for a few minutes, with Healy all for accepting the chance, and with Taylor doubtful. Then Healy went out.

AUGUSTUS left his private office also. He thought he'd go to the shop for a few minutes. Alex handled production, but Augustus liked to poke around the lines and keep his finger in production, too. He liked the machines, and the hard-handed lads putting them through their tricks. The men liked him, too, he thought.

He wandered to the cooler in the general office first, and took an aspirin with a drink of water. That confounded little ache in his head! Had he better go to a doctor about it? He decided not. It really wasn't bad enough. It was just the oddity of the thing. It seemed to be just over the roof of his mouth, making him feel a little as you feel when you eat ice-cream too fast.

He walked toward the records clerk, whose desk was nearest the door. A nice kid. Benny Something. A good worker. He was bending studiously over ruled yellow cards on his desk now. Augustus stared at him—and for a moment didn't see Benny at all!

Instead, as clearly as though seeing it on a three-dimensional movie screen, he saw two figures. Benny, and a girl. And their activities were such as to halt Taylor in his tracks and turn his face a red that was somewhere between brick and purple.

The girl had reddish hair and was young and altogether lovely. At the moment she sat on Benny's lap and clung to Benny, and she looked lovingly into Benny's eyes while he stared back lovingly into hers. It was a picture that might have been appropriate on the shore of a moonlit lake, but here—in an office!

Taylor uttered a sort of croak and grasped at the wall for support.

"Stop that!" he bellowed.

The image swiftly dissolved, and he saw Benny, alone and perfectly decorous, staring up in alarm at him from his work-piled desk.

"Stop what?" said Benny, mouth open in amazement.

"Why——" said Taylor. "Why——"

He stopped there. He could find nothing more to say.

Benny got up and hurried to him. He put his hand under Taylor's arm.

"Mr. Taylor! Is anything the matter? Do you feel all right? Can I get you anything?"

Augustus stared over Benny's shoulder.

Two desks behind Benny's, looking at him anxiously as all the rest in the office were now looking, was a girl with reddish hair. She was the girl Taylor had seen with Benny; pretty, but not as downright beautiful as she had been in the tableau; and furthermore quite decent in posture.

"I'm all right," said Taylor. "Quite all right, now. Don't worry."

Benny stood a moment longer with his hand under Taylor's arm. "Okay," he said, and went back to his desk.

Augustus resumed his way toward the shop door, and the office force returned to their tasks.

"Good Lord!" Augustus muttered to himself.

An inkling of what this was all about had begun to penetrate. Maybe it should have penetrated before, but it hadn't. A practical man doesn't waste time dwelling on impossible things.

"Good Lord!"

He was reading people's minds. That was the explanation of the fantastic thing he'd just seen at Benny's desk, and of the incredible messages of Alex and Miss Plummer. Thoughts had come to him, not scenes or words. How the ability had been given him, he didn't know. But it had been, unless he had suddenly gone plain crazy and was imagining these things.

HE GOT to the shop, a bewildered, rather frightened man, and started down the double row of light stamping-machines set up on the third floor. The foreman came toward him, a stocky man with square hands and a smiling face in which shrewd eyes were set. They met beside a machine that was stamping out plate-gears as fast as three-eighths sheet steel could be fed into it.

"Hel-*lo*, Mr. Taylor." The foreman was a genial soul. "Out here to poke your fat nose in business you know nothing about?"

Augustus bit his lip. The last sentence hadn't been spoken; the foreman's mouth hadn't moved.

"Hello," he said stiffly. "How's the rush order for Temple Wheel coming along?"

"Fine, Mr. Taylor. Fine." The man smiled at him, and Taylor suddenly saw a plump, pink-faced gentleman held under the adjacent stamping-machine while the pounding dies made cat's meat of him. The plump gentleman was himself, and the holder was the smiling foreman. Just a nice little picture lasting for perhaps half a second, and then dissolving.

"Just thought I'd ask," said Taylor, plump shoulders drooping. He turned, went back to his office, got his coat and hat, and left the building. He got in his car and drove downtown. There he entered a bar, the first time he'd ever seen one before two in the afternoon. He ordered a straight rye, and stood over it.

The rye soothed that queer little ache that had snapped on so suddenly in his head, and blanketed some of the chaos in his brain. He had two more, and then went out and stood on the crowded downtown street corner.

A lovely sense of well-being suddenly possessed him. He hadn't felt that way since his honeymoon, twenty-two years ago. He turned, smiling, and looked into the face of a woman who was approaching the corner. She was about fifty, dressed in black including peculiarly hideous black gloves, and walked with a slight limp. She wore woman's-club glasses, and she glared through them at Taylor's languorous smile.

Even as she glared, Taylor's dreamy but normal sense of well-being turned into something exotic in the extreme. He stared at the woman with saucer eyes.

"How dare you stare at me like that!" the woman snapped through frosty lips, and went on.

Taylor drew a long breath, and gave himself over to the thought-currents of

the passers-by, most of whom ignored him. The mechanics of this thing began to be resolved into some sort of clarity.

It seemed that he read people's minds in several different ways. Sometimes he got thoughts as words, sometimes as pictures, sometimes merely as half-defined, pure sensation. But then that was natural, he told the three straight ryes under his belt. That was the way everybody thought: in words, if it was about something you couldn't see in your mind's eye; in pictures if it was action that could be physically imagined; in abstract sensation if the idea could be neither pictured nor verbally expressed.

The business got kind of fascinating, for all Taylor was still more than a little scared by his new ability. One of the most interesting phases of it, he found, was the sheer obscenity emanating from the minds of the damnedest proper-looking people. He'd thought a few things himself, he admitted, but nothing like the pictures and sensations he got from some of the pinched-lipped men and business-like women passing him in the crowd.

HE STAYED there till nearly one, and the ryes wore off and he realized he'd better be getting to that luncheon with Proctor and Alex.

It was a conservative club. Proctor, a kindly-looking elderly man, respected as dean of the automobile business, chatted with Healy and Taylor till eating and drinking was done. Then he broached his proposition of buying their output.

"It leaves you safe in spite of the fact that you're putting all the Taylor-Healy eggs in one basket," Proctor concluded benignly. "For I propose to sign a contract that binds me indefinitely to buy all my gears from you, at a cost-plus price. For my own protection I'd like to add a clause to the effect that I be temporarily released from that contract in case of emergency. If your production bogged down, or for some other reason you couldn't deliver the goods, I'd have to get material from someone else, of course." His kindly eyes twinkled. "And we'll see to it, by God, that your production does bog down. Then you'll go bankrupt and Healy and I will take over, with Healy right under my fist."

Taylor turned his wine-glass, with thumb and forefinger manipulating the stem; turned it and turned it.

"The clause is meaningless, of course," Proctor said. This time his lips were moving. "Just a technicality. The main thing is that I would be assured of a steady supply, and you of a steady market——"

"No," said Augustus, looking at the glass.

"Eh?" Proctor blinked.

"We'll pass up your 'nice' proposition, you dirty crook."

"Young man," said Proctor, rising trembling to his feet.

"Augustus!" said Healy. "Are you crazy?" He turned to Proctor. "I don't know what ails him. Pay no attention. We'll think it over some more——"

"No, we won't," said Taylor. "I own controlling interest, and I say we won't. Like it or lump it, both of you. I think I'll go home for the rest of the day, Alex. I don't feel well."

Which was a mild way of putting it. Didn't feel well? He felt like the prince of pariahs slinking down the streets of hell. His secretary loathed him, his partner wanted to kill him off, his favorite foreman would like to throw him to the punch-presses, his office force engaged itself in mental seduction, and now one of the most venerated men in business had just tried to swindle him like a common crook. Decidedly he didn't feel well!

It wasn't till he got to his own threshold that a quite obvious thing struck him. No person with whom he'd come in contact since this mad ability to read minds had

been visited on him, had entertained a kindly thought for him—with the possible exception of the frost-faced matron in the black gloves. Now he was entering his own home to greet his wife. What would *her* thoughts be like?

IT WAS mid-May and sunny, but the redolent breeze felt cold on Taylor's forehead. He and Louise had lived together for twenty-two years in a contentment that was remarked on by all who knew them. They did have their spats once in a while, but really they adored each other and lived only for each other. They said so, frequently; and Augustus knew that, for his part, he was actually quite fond of Louise, and he'd always been sure that she was fond of him. But then, Alex had always acted the part of a perfect partner, and Miss Plummer had looked as if she couldn't say "Darn" without getting her tongue twisted over the improper word, and his third-floor foreman had seemed to have a positive affection for him, and Benny. . . .

Taylor dabbed at his forehead. What did Louise really think, under her smooth placidity and almost sluggish propriety? He didn't want to know, and in about a minute he was going to, unless he turned around and went away again.

However, that was a stupid longing. He had to face his wife sometime. He opened the door with his key and stepped in. He heard his wife's voice in the little side sitting-room. She was talking to someone on the phone.

He felt like yelling to her, "Louise, it's me. Come to me, but don't think. Talk to me but don't think. Don't think!" He felt like turning tail and running. He actually did start out the door again, but with a driven curse he turned back; so determinedly, indeed, that the hall rug slipped under his feet and he fell, banging his head against the wall, not hard, because he'd gotten his hand up, but hard enough.

Louise appeared in the sitting-room doorway.

"Augustus!" she said. "When did you get in?"

"Just now," said Taylor.

"You mean—just now? You didn't come in a minute ago?"

"I came in this very minute," said Augustus, rubbing his head. He wasn't looking at her. Maybe if he didn't look at her he wouldn't be able to read her mind.

Louise came up to him, then, cooing sympathy. "Poor darling! Here, let me help you up. Give me the coat and hat. Sit down here. I'll finish my phone talk and mix a shaker of cocktails to celebrate your afternoon off and cure your head. I was talking to Ada Bronston when you came in. Did you ever meet her? Awfully nice, but a bore sometimes."

She was retreating to the sitting-room, from the library, as she talked. Augustus heard her at the phone again.

"Darling, it's off for this afternoon. Don't come over. My husband's playing truant from the office, so I'll be with him. Yes. *Husband.* Sorry, *Ada.*"

Augustus rubbed his head. There was a little lump on it, but that was all. He was rubbing mechanically, not thinking about the bump, thinking about the odd headache instead. It was gone. He couldn't feel it at all, any more.

Louise came from the kitchen with a shaker of elaborately mixed cocktails in an incredibly short time, considering it was the servants' day off and she must have mixed them herself. But Augustus didn't pay much attention to the time element. He was busy with the fact that his curious deep headache was gone, and with the fact that all he got from Louise was what she said. He didn't seem able to read minds any more.

Perversely, now, he regretted it. But he decided that on the whole he was glad.

"You who walk in the farthest shadows by the black lakes of Hali, listen to me."

The Death Watch

By HUGH B. CAVE

What ghastly thing was it that came clumping into the big house out of that wild night of storm? A goose-flesh story with a real thrill!

IN A WAY it was my fault. But I had known Elaine Ingram for years, and when she asked me for the details of her brother's passing I could not force myself to tell her the truth.

When she said to me that night, right after the funeral, "Did he ask for me before he went, Harry?"—I lied to her. I had to.

"Yes," I said, "he kept asking for you.

He kept saying how much he loved you."

"Did he say he would come back?" Elaine whispered.

"Yes," I told her; "he said he'd come back."

She and her husband, Peter Ingram, took over the old house out there at the edge of the swamp. Peter was a writer; he could make a living anywhere. And Elaine insisted on moving in because, she said, Mark would be coming back sometime and he would surely return to the house in which he had died.

For six months they lived in that house, and I got to be pretty good friends with Peter. He'd come over to the radio station every now and then and sit with me while I was on watch. Sometimes on the mid-watch, which is usually dull around four in the morning, he'd poke about, asking questions, and I'd tell him what I knew about being a radio man.

He had a natural aptitude for that sort of thing and before long he could have sat there at the bug and worked a shift without much trouble, if I'd dared to let him.

One night he was sitting there, watching me, and when a lull came and I leaned back to light a cigarette, he said suddenly: "Harry, I'm worried about Elaine."

I knew what the trouble was. Elaine was convinced, you see, that her dead brother would come back to her.

"She just sits there in the living-room," Peter said, "and never says a word. Old Yago sits there with her. Harry, I've got to do something about it. It's driving me insane."

I said: "Why don't you get rid of Yago?"

"Elaine likes him."

This Yago had lived in various shacks around town for as long as I could remember.

He claimed to be a Seminole Indian. He drank a lot, and folks said he was queer. Whatever he was, Elaine had taken a fancy to him and hired him to work around the place; and now he was living there.

"Harry," Peter said, "I've got to convince her that she's wrong, that the dead don't come back. But she won't talk to me any more. If I sent Yago away, she'd just go deeper into those damned books of hers."

I thought it over for a few days, and one day I said to him: "Why don't *you* read up on spiritualism? You can't expect to argue with Elaine unless you can talk her language. Study the stuff for a while and you'll be able to pick the holes in it."

He was fooling with an old amplifier which had been lying on my desk. He looked up at me, stared a moment, then nodded. I didn't see him again for two weeks.

BILL MACY said to me one day: "What the devil is Ingram up to? I was in the post office this morning and there were half a dozen boxes of equipment from the Beacon Radio Company, addressed to him. I thought he was a writer."

"The poor guy's got to have a hobby of some kind," I said. "He's lonely."

But that night, to satisfy my curiosity, I figured out an excuse for calling on him, and drove over there about nine o'clock.

It was a black night, and when the nights get black in Florida they're like ink. I drove slowly because the road was bad, and I could hear the frogs grunting in the swamp all around me, and after a while I saw the lighted windows of the house.

You can't imagine a house in a place like that unless you've lived in Florida and seen some of the left-overs from the boom. This place was enormous. It had about twelve rooms and looked like a small hotel, very ornate and elaborate, and yet it was the only house for miles around.

As I remember, some wealthy chap from New York figured the town would grow out that far, and sank a small fortune in

the house and then realized his mistake. He put it in the hands of an agent, who couldn't sell it—because who would want to live miles from civilization on the edge of a swamp filled with snakes and 'gators and bugs?

So the agent rented the place to Elaine and Mark and their mother—this was before Elaine married Peter Ingram—and I think they paid twenty a month for it. Then the mother died and Elaine was married, and Mark stayed on alone.

He was a radio man and a good one, but that house did something to him. We at the station noticed the change in him and begged him to move into town, but he bought a lot of books and told us to mind our own business.

He gave up his job in August. Bill Macy relieved him one morning at eight, and he said to Bill: "Tell Crandall I'm through." Just like that. When I heard it, I went out to the house and begged him to reconsider. I told him it was unfair of him to quit like that, without giving me a chance to get a man to replace him.

He stared at me, and there was a queer, dull light in his eyes, and his eyes never blinked. "I'm sorry," he said, "but I have work to do."

For a month I didn't see him. Then the rumor spread around that he was sick, and I went there to find out.

He was sick all right. That queer, dull light in his eyes had become a wild glare that scared me. He looked half starved and had a raging fever.

I drove back to town and got Doc Wendell. And that night, while Doc and I watched over him, Mark died.

Now Elaine and Peter and old Yago had the place, and when I climbed out of my car that night, Yago opened the door to me.

"Hello," I said. "Is Mr. Ingram at home?"

Yago nodded and I followed him inside to the living-room. It was an enormous room, with a big fireplace and a lot of musty furniture, and Elaine was sitting there, reading. Yago limped over to a chair near the fireplace and paid no more attention to me, and Elaine looked up and said:

""Hello, Harry."

"I've got a swell story for Peter," I said. "Is he around?"

"He's upstairs."

She didn't get up to go after him, but just sat there, staring at me. She was a good-looking girl, Elaine, a little bit on the short side but slim and trim, with very even features. She seemed tired, though, and I could see that she hadn't bothered much about her looks lately. Careless, I suppose, because they didn't have many visitors and she seldom went anywhere except to the village.

"I'll go talk to him," I said, but she shook her head.

"He's working. I'm afraid he won't want to be disturbed."

Well, there was something queer in the air, and I didn't exactly know what to do. I could have laughed it off and gone up to Peter's workroom anyway, but something in the way Elaine was looking at me gave me the creeps.

"It *is* pretty late," I mumbled. "Maybe I'd better come around some other time."

But just then I heard a door open upstairs, and Peter called down: "Is that you, Harry?"

When I went up, I saw right away that he was in bad shape. He was wearing slacks and slippers and no shirt, and needed a shave, and looked all in. He couldn't have looked any worse after a week's drunk.

"Been a long time since I've seen you, Mister," I said.

He nodded, and kept on nodding for a moment while he stared at me. He seemed to be making up his mind to do something, and then rather abruptly he gripped my

arm and said: "Want to show you something."

HIS workroom was at the end of the hall and he didn't release my arm until we were inside with the door closed. "Even my wife hasn't been in this room for the past two weeks," he said. "Look."

I looked, and my mouth sagged open.

It was a big room and reeked of stale cigarette smoke. The shades were down. I guessed that they'd been down, and the windows, too, for a long time. And the whole back end of the room was piled with radio junk!

"What the devil," I demanded, "are you doing? Building a broadcasting station?"

"Look it over," he said quietly.

I looked it over. He had some ultra-short-wave apparatus that was unlike any "ultra-freq" stuff I had ever seen. The receiver apparently was still in the experimental stage, with loose wires and disconnected condensers sprawled in a mess, but the transmitter was what made me suck in my breath.

I knew what this "ultra" stuff was all about, but the weird-looking amplifiers Peter had hooked to his transmitter stumped me.

He saw me squinting with disbelief.

"Don't worry," he said. "It'll work. I'm throwing the ultra high-frequencies clear out of the spectrum with that amplification hook-up."

"About all you'll do," I said, "is drive the boys at the station mad, interfering with our reception. What's more, you haven't a license."

"For what I'm doing I don't need a license. Besides, it's far from finished. I'll be a month working on it yet before I'm ready."

I walked over to his desk, and he had a stack of radio books there that would have tested the learning of an advanced electrical engineer. I started to look them over but he said gently: "Never mind those, Harry."

He pulled open a drawer. There were more books in the drawer—books of a different sort.

"Some of these were in the house when we came here," he said. "Mark must have been studying them. Others I obtained by mail, from a collector."

I skimmed through a couple of them, but it was all Greek to me. Stuff about the Black Mass and Bethmoora and the black lakes of Hali. Stuff about voodoo and the dark arts.

"Hell," I said, "only a nut would bother wading through this junk. What's eating you, anyway?"

"She reads it," he said.

"Who? Elaine?"

"Yes."

"You mean she takes this junk seriously?"

He nodded. I didn't like the way he stared at me, or the way he handled those books when he replaced them in the drawer. He seemed to resent my disbelief, and he touched the books the way some folks touch a Bible. Reverently, sort of.

Then suddenly he said: "Elaine mustn't know about this. You understand? She thinks I'm working on a novel."

"That's what I thought, too," I said.

"Well, you know better now. But you mustn't tell Elaine."

I told him I wouldn't tell Elaine. I told him he could stand some sleep, too, and if he didn't ease up a little he'd find himself in bed with a nervous breakdown.

His answer to that was a crazy kind of laugh, and the same sort of laughter kept coming in little gusts from way down inside him as he walked with me along the hall.

"I'll be over to see you soon," he promised, and held my hand for a minute; and I felt his eyes on me as I went down the stairs.

I turned, said, "So long," and walked into the living-room to say good-night to Elaine. Evidently I didn't make much noise. Elaine didn't hear me coming.

She was on her knees there in the shadows, and in front of her was a table on which stood a photograph of Mark. Her hands gripped the edge of the table and her gaze was glued to the photograph. I thought she was praying.

Naturally I took a step backward and would have faded into the hall again without disturbing her. But then I heard the words that were whispering from her lips.

"Hear me, O Mighty Nyarlathotep!" she was incanting. "You who walk in the farthest shadows by the black lakes of Hali, listen to me, I entreat you! And you, O Hastur, O Prince of Evil! Send him back to me, for my own god has failed me. Give him to me as he promised to return. . . ."

I stood there, chewing my lips and gaping at her. It didn't make sense. It was a mumbo-jumbo that scared me, and I felt little shivers crawling over me.

Then, while Elaine went on repeating those same words, I saw Yago, the Seminole. He was sitting on the other side of the room, staring straight at me. It was dark over there, and his eyes were like red coals in the darkness, and I suddenly had a feeling that if I intruded, those coals would burn me.

I'd had enough. I tiptoed out of there and closed the front door behind me as softly as I could. I got into my car and turned it around and drove back out of the swamp.

That night I stood the mid-watch, and jumped at every slightest sound. My nerves were as tight as fiddle-strings. Even the shrill cackle of code couldn't make me feel at ease, and once, while I was working the *S. S. Exhibitor,* a big housewife spider came slowly through the open door into the operating-room, and I went over backward with a shriek.

I didn't go near Peter Ingram's house for three long weeks. I wanted to forget what I'd seen there. But then one night . . .

MACY was supposed to relieve me at midnight. At eleven, his wife phoned to say he was sick, so I called George Latham's home, to get George out. His wife answered. George was at the fights. When he came in, she said, she'd hustle him over to the station.

At one o'clock I'd been on duty for nine hours, and was all in, and suddenly everything went wrong. A Norwegian freighter was calling with important business, and a mad clatter of meaningless dots and dashes came out of nowhere to drown him out and tear my ears off.

For half an hour it continued unabated. When George arrived, I was a mental wreck and was cursing my head off.

"Listen to it!" I said.

And suddenly there was something else for us to listen to!

It was the voice of Peter Ingram! For a while it slurred up and down the scale, the way a phonograph sounds if you press a finger against the turntable, slowing it, then letting it speed up, then slowing it again. We couldn't distinguish words right away, because of the crazy variations in tone. But finally the tone leveled out, and Ingram's voice roared through the operating-room.

George Latham and I stared at each other, and neither spoke. I don't know what he was thinking, but my thoughts were back in the shadowed living-room of that big house on the edge of the swamp. I was standing there with Yago's glittering eyes on me, and I was watching Elaine —because the words that came roaring through the phones were almost the same words I had heard Elaine whispering, on that other occasion.

Something about the black lakes of Hali . . . about Nyarlathotep and Hastur and

the Prince of Evil . . . and Mark, Elaine's brother, who was dead and who had promised to come back.

It went on and on, on and on, and we listened to it. An S. O. S. couldn't have silenced the air-lanes any more completely. Both George and I knew that every operator within listening distance was doing exactly what we were—forgetting his job and concentrating on that weird, crazy babble of words from Peter Ingram.

Finally George said explosively: "I've been telling you for weeks that guy is goofy! Listen to him!"

I was listening. *"Harken to me, O Mighty Nyarlathotep! You who rule the midnight forests by the shores of Hali, hear me. . . ."*

"I'm going over there," I said.

For Peter's sake, I had to. For our own, too. The crazy fool was interfering with all kinds of important business. If he kept it up, he'd have the law down on his neck, and then maybe it would get back to us—we'd be criticized for having let him monkey around the station.

I didn't want to lose my job. I didn't want Peter to get into any trouble either, because, in spite of what I'd seen and heard, I still thought the world of Elaine.

So George Latham took over, and I backed my car out of the station garage and drove over to that house on the edge of the swamp. It was raining a little, and the road was black and dangerous, and there was a light in Peter's workroom, but the rest of the house was in darkness.

I stepped into a pool of water at the foot of the steps and began cursing. The door was locked; I had to knock, and then had to stand there for what seemed like an hour, waiting for someone to answer my pounding.

OLD YAGO opened up. I said, "I want to see Peter; it's important," and I pushed past him. He turned to stare at me as I strode to the stairs. I could feel his eyes eating into my back. Not until I was halfway up the staircase did he close the door; and while I was hiking along the hall to Peter's workroom I heard the Indian climbing after me.

Peter's door was shut. I banged on it. A chair scraped inside, and there was a queer, heavy silence for about ten seconds —which seemed a long time—and Peter said: "I'm not ready for you yet. Go back to bed."

"It's Harry Crandall," I said.

"Who?"

"Harry Crandall. And I've got to talk to you!"

The chair scraped again, and I heard footsteps. I should have been prepared, I suppose. I should have remembered how thin and emaciated he'd been on my last visit. But the door opened, and I took one look at the man and stepped back, cold all over. He was like a ghost.

"Come in," he said. "I thought you were my wife."

I kept staring at him. His face was dead-white, and his eyes were like holes burned in a sheet. He hadn't slept, hadn't eaten, for days; I was sure of it. His hands shook, and a bulging little muscle at the side of his mouth kept twitching, and his breathing was hoarse and fast, as if the effort hurt him.

He closed the door, put a claw-like hand on my arm and pulled me toward the desk on the other side of the room. The desk was a radio table now—of a sort. It was cluttered with wires and paraphernalia, and in the midst of the chaos hung a microphone.

"I'm working on ultra high-frequency waves," Ingram said. "This outfit here"—and he pointed to the transmitter—"is a special apparatus for throwing the signals outside the known spectrum."

I put my legs wide apart and jammed my hands against my hips and glared at

him. "You weren't working the high-frequency waves a while ago," I growled. "You raised hell with everything on the Atlantic coast!"

"I was experimenting then. Probably had some parasitics. That's ironed out. Now I'm ready to begin."

I glanced over his apparatus. I'm no Marconi, but I know enough about radio to know that ultra high-frequency stuff is all in the experimental stage, and damned deep. Evidently he'd been doing a lot of reading.

But the book that lay open beside the microphone was not a radio book. It was one of those tomes from the desk drawer and was full of stuff I wouldn't want to read unless I were good and drunk in broad daylight. Queer formulæ, queer names, rituals . . . all that stuff. Necromancy, I guess you'd call it. And some of those formulæ, if I know my languages, were in Arabic.

"This," I said, "is what you were sending out over the air?"

He nodded. His hand was pawing my arm again, pulling me aside, and there was an odd expression on his face—a queer twist of unholy anticipation—as he lowered himself into the chair. The hand that closed over that microphone was as thin and bony as the fist of a corpse.

"Listen," he muttered. "I'll show you!"

"But——"

"Don't worry. I'll not interfere with the station. What I have to say will go out where no human words have ever gone before. I've worked for weeks to reach out into the void. Tonight, just before you came, I had an answer."

"An answer from what?" I said, frowning.

"I don't know yet. But now——"

Well, I stood there and listened to him, and before many minutes passed I was cold as ice, and afraid. I'm a sober man; I've stood many a mid-watch alone, with wind rattling the windows and rain hammering a dirge on the station-house roof . . . but the words that whispered from Peter Ingram's quivering lips scared me.

It was the same old stuff at first, but the ghastly eagerness in Ingram's half-mad face made it different. The guy actually believed he was talking to someone. You could tell by his eyes, by the way he glued his mouth to the mike.

He mumbled Arabic, then went back to English. "Listen to me, O Nyarlathotep, O ruler of the darkest dwelling-places of the far departed. Hear me, in the name of the twisted ones who crawl through the halls of Hell! Hear me, in the name of her who suckles the legless children of the vast Lake of Hali. The Mass is midnight black, and crimson blood flows from the wounds of the gods I have denounced. Take me to thine own scaly bosom and hear my prayer. . . .

"I was an unbeliever, O Mighty One. I sought thee first with ridicule for my wife who believes in thee. I would have proved to her that there was no life after death, no hope, no return for the departed. Now I would bring the dead back to her, and this is the night. This is the night I have awaited, O Prince of Darkest Dark! He died when the wind wailed as it does tonight, and when the storm gathered. Tonight the way is open. . . ."

Peter Ingram wasn't talking for my benefit. He didn't even know I was standing there watching him, listening to him. When his voice trailed off he still sat there, gripping the mike, and his hands were shaking, and beads of sweat dripped from his wasted face and splashed on the open book in front of him.

The room was still as a tomb. The rain whipping against the windows seemed to make no sound, and wind whining around the house had no voice. Not for me. My heart was sledging, and I was cold, and scared.

Something here was all wrong. In a kind of daze, I realized that. Weeks ago, Peter Ingram had dug his teeth into a study of this stuff in order to prove to Elaine that she was wrong in her beliefs. He'd been determined then to convince her that her dead brother never would or could come back. And now he believed all that she believed, and more!

The man was mad!

"Listen," I mumbled. "For God's sake, stop this business. Forget it."

But he was whispering into the microphone again, paying no attention to me.

"Send him back to her, O Mighty One," he pleaded. "It was on a night like this that he died, and on his lips was a promise to return. Grant him that dying wish this night! Let him return!"

SUDDENLY he stiffened, sat there with his eyes closed and began to tremble from head to foot. I took a step backward, staring at him.

"Listen!" he shouted. "Listen, Elaine! An answer! I swore to you I'd get an answer, and I have! I am!"

Well, I didn't hear anything. I told them later, at the police station, that I did not hear anything, and I repeat it here, so help me God, *I didn't hear anything!* Peter Ingram sat there, sucking breath and gasping it out again, and I stared at him, and that was all.

For about one minute—one endless, horrible minute—that was all. Then I did hear something downstairs.

A door opened. The wind hurled it shut again, and glass broke—so I knew it was the front door. Then I heard footsteps.

They weren't the kind of footsteps you'd have made or I'd have made. They were heavy, house-jarring thuds that rattled the walls and shook the floor on which I was standing. They were slow, plodding steps.

Someone down there had come in by the front door—which was locked—and was walking along the hall. Someone huge, heavy. My mind flashed to a picture of Frankenstein's monster, striding in out of the storm. . . .

Peter Ingram swung around in his chair and stared at the door. The door was closed. I think now that Peter expected the thing downstairs to come up and open that door—to come up in answer to the words he had mumbled over the mike. But Elaine's room was downstairs, and the thing strode along the hall down there, and I heard a door clatter open, and then—and then a woman was screaming.

God, that scream!

The sound came wailing up to us, shrill as the zero-shriek of a hurricane. It ripped and slashed its way through the whole house, drowning out the yammer of the rain, the voices of the storm outside. For one long, ghastly minute it continued unabated, and then it became a hideous gurgling sound, and I heard something else mixed up in it.

I heard a guttural, snarling voice, and a sound of human bodies thrashing about in a death-struggle. The voice was a man's.

"Damn you!" it bellowed. "You left me alone! You left me here to rot! Damn you!" And then the voice became a grisly peal of mad, maniacal laughter, and the woman's screams were silent.

About that time, I reached the door of Peter Ingram's workroom, and got the door open, and went stumbling down the hall toward the stairs. And the voice was still hurling out bursts of triumphant mirth.

It was dark down there. I think I yelled out: "Elaine, I'm coming! I'm coming!" but I'm not sure of that—or of certain other things, either. I do know that a scurrying shape sped along the lower hall while I was descending the stairs. That shape was whimpering and sobbing like a frightened animal, and it rushed to the front door, which was open, and it van-

ished into the night. It was Yago, the Indian.

I do know, too, that Peter Ingram stood there at the head of the staircase and kept shouting: "They answered me, Elaine! They answered me!"

But Ingram was crazy. The doctors said he was crazy.

Anyway, I got to the bottom of those stairs and found a light-switch and went stumbling along the lower hall to Elaine's room. The door was open, and I would have rushed in if the light hadn't shown me what awaited me.

THE room was a shambles. Chairs were overturned, and the bedclothes were all over the floor, and the floor was red. Red with blood. Elaine lay in a crumpled, twisted heap against the legs of a dressing-table.

I didn't have to go any closer to know that I couldn't be of any help. I could see her face, her throat. Something with unbelievably powerful hands had torn her. . . .

I backed out over the threshold. I turned on all the lights and staggered to the foot of the stairs and stared up at Ingram, who was still up there, waiting.

"Come down," I mumbled. "For God's sake, Peter, come down here!" But he just stood there, gripping the wall with one hand, the bannister-post with the other, and he kept shouting: "I've had an answer! Tell Elaine to hurry! I've had an answer!"

I left him there. I staggered out of the house and got into my car and drove to town. When the police went there, about half an hour later, they found Ingram pacing back and forth along the upstairs corridor, enraged because his wife would not go up to him. And they found Elaine in her room downstairs, as I'd left her.

Later they listened to me, and I told them exactly what I've told you, and they stared at me and exchanged glances and said firmly: "Yago is the man we want. We'll find him."

They didn't find Yago. They haven't yet. He was a Seminole Indian, and the Seminoles know every inch of the Everglades, every hiding-place of the great swamp.

Yago will never be found, and perhaps that's best. Because if they caught him, he might tell them the truth—or what I think is the truth—and he might make them believe it. And then they would question me again, and *I* might tell the whole truth.

I think about it when I'm alone on the mid-watch. I hear the wind wailing out of the swamp, and hear the frogs grunting . . . and I think of the night Elaine's brother died. Because in the very beginning I should have told Elaine and Peter *how* he died, instead of lying to them.

I should have told them that Mark was a raving maniac when Doc Wendell and I sat beside his bed that night. I should have told them that he not only promised to come back, but *swore* to come back—swore in a mad outburst of rage to return and destroy his sister for having deserted him.

The hours of the mid-watch are long and black . . . and more than once, on my knees, I've prayed for daylight. . . .

We are no other than a moving row
Of Magic Shadow-shapes that come and go
Round with the Sun-illumined Lantern held
In Midnight by the Master of the Show.
—Omar Khayyam.

Celephais

By H. P. LOVECRAFT

A posthumous weird fantasy

IN A DREAM Kuranes saw the city in the valley, and the sea-coast beyond, and the snowy peak overlooking the sea, and the gayly painted galleys that sail out of the harbor toward distant regions where the sea meets the sky. In a dream it was also that he came by his name of Kuranes, for when awake he was called by another name. Perhaps it was natural for him to dream a new name; for he was the last of his family, and alone among the indifferent millions of London; so there were not many to speak to him and to remind him who he had been.

His money and lands were gone, and he did not care for the ways of the people about him, but preferred to dream and write of his dreams. What he wrote was laughed at by those to whom he showed it, so that after a time he kept his writings to himself, and finally ceased to write. The more he withdrew from the world about him, the more wonderful became his dreams; and it would have been quite futile to try to describe them on paper. Kuranes was not modern, and did not think like others who wrote. Whilst they strove to strip from life its embroidered robes of myth and to show in naked ugliness the foul thing that is reality, Kuranes sought for beauty alone. When truth and experience failed to reveal it, he sought it in fancy and illusion, and found it on his very doorstep, amid the nebulous memories of childhood tales and dreams.

There are not many persons who know what wonders are opened to them in the stories and visions of their youth; for when as children we listen and dream, we think but half-formed thoughts, and when as men we try to remember, we are dulled and prosaic with the poison of life. But some of us awake in the night with strange phantasms of enchanted hills and gardens, of fountains that sing in the sun, of golden cliffs overhanging murmuring seas, of plains that stretch down to sleeping cities of bronze and stone, and of shadowy companies of heroes that ride caparisoned white horses along the edges of thick forests; and then we know that we have looked back through the ivory gates into that world of wonder which was ours before we were wise and unhappy.

KURANES came very suddenly upon his old world of childhood. He had been dreaming of the house where he had been born; the great stone house covered with ivy, where thirteen generations of his ancestors had lived, and where he had hoped to die. It was moonlight, and he had stolen out into the fragrant summer night, through the gardens, down the terraces, past the great oaks of the park, and along the long white road to the village. The village seemed very old, eaten away at the edge like the moon which had commenced to wane, and Kuranes wondered whether the peaked roofs of the small houses hid sleep or death. In the streets were spears of long grass, and the window-panes on either side were broken or filmily staring.

Kuranes had not lingered, but had plodded on as though summoned toward some goal. He dared not disobey the summons for fear it might prove an illusion like the urges and aspirations of waking life, which do not lead to any goal. Then he had been drawn down a lane that led off from the village street toward the channel cliffs, and had come to the end of things—to the precipice and the abyss where all the village and all the world fell abruptly into the unechoing emptiness of infinity, and where even the sky ahead was empty and unlit by the crumbling moon and the peering stars. Faith had urged him on, over the precipice and into the gulf, where he had floated down, down, down; past dark, shapeless, undreamed dreams, faintly glowing spheres that may have been partly dreamed dreams, and laughing winged things that seemed to mock the dreamers of all the worlds. Then a rift seemed to open in the darkness before him, and he saw the city of the valley, glistening radiantly far, far below, with a background of sea and sky, and a snow-capped mountain near the shore.

Kuranes had awaked the very moment he beheld the city, yet he knew from his brief glance that it was none other than Celephais, in the Valley of Ooth-Nargai beyond the Tanarian Hills where his spirit had dwelt all the eternity of an hour one summer afternoon very long ago, when he had slipt away from his nurse and let the warm sea-breeze lull him to sleep as he watched the clouds from the cliff.

He had protested then, when they had found him, waked him, and carried him home, for just as he was aroused he had been about to sail in a golden galley for those alluring regions where the sea meets the sky. And now he was equally resentful of awaking, for he had found his fabulous city after forty weary years.

But three nights afterward Kuranes came again to Celephais.

AS BEFORE, he dreamed first of the village that was asleep or dead, and of the abyss down which one must float silently; then the rift appeared again, and he beheld the glittering minarets of the city, and saw the graceful galleys riding at anchor in the blue harbor, and watched the gingko trees of Mount Aran swaying in the sea-breeze. But this time he was not snatched away, and like a winged being settled gradually over a grassy hillside till finally his feet rested gently on the turf. He had indeed come back to the Valley of Ooth-Nargai and the splendid city of Celephais.

Down the hill amid scented grasses and brilliant flowers walked Kuranes, over the bubbling Naraxa on the small wooden bridge where he had carved his name so many years ago, and through the whispering grove to the great stone bridge by the city gate. All was as of old, nor were the marble walls discolored, nor the polished bronze statues upon them tarnished. And Kuranes saw that he need not tremble lest the things he knew be vanished; for even the sentries on the ramparts were the same, and still as young as he remembered them. When he entered the city, past the bronze gates and over the onyx pavements, the merchants and camel-drivers greeted him as if he had never been away; and it was the same at the turquoise temple of Nath-Horthath, where the orchid-wreathed priests told him that there is no time in Ooth-Nargai, but only perpetual youth.

Then Kuranes walked through the Street of Pillars to the seaward wall, where gathered the traders and sailors, and strange men from the regions where the sea meets the sky. There he stayed long, gazing out over the bright harbor where the ripples sparkled beneath an unknown sun, and where rode lightly the galleys from far places over the water. And he gazed also upon Mount Aran rising regally from the shore, its lower slopes

green with swaying trees and its white summit touching the sky.

More than ever Kuranes wished to sail in a galley to the far places of which he had heard so many strange tales, and he sought again the captain who had agreed to carry him so long ago. He found the man, Athib, sitting on the same chest of spice he had sat upon before, and Athib seemed not to realize that any time had passed. Then the two rowed to a galley in the harbor, and giving orders to the oarmen, commenced to sail out into the billowy Cerenarian Sea that leads to the sky. For several days they glided undulatingly over the water, till finally they came to the horizon, where the sea meets the sky. Here the galley paused not at all, but floated easily in the blue of the sky among fleecy clouds tinted with rose. And far beneath the keel Kuranes could see strange lands and rivers and cities of surpassing beauty, spread indolently in the sunshine which seemed never to lessen or disappear. At length Athib told him that their journey was near its end, and that they would soon enter the harbor of Serannian, the pink marble city of the clouds, which is built on that ethereal coast where the west wind flows into the sky; but as the highest of the city's carven towers came into sight there was a sound somewhere in space, and Kuranes awaked in his London garret.

FOR many months after that Kuranes sought the marvelous city of Celephais and its sky-bound galleys in vain; and though his dreams carried him to many gorgeous and unheard-of places, no one whom he met could tell him how to find Ooth-Nargai beyond the Tanarian Hills. One night he went flying over dark mountains where there were faint, lone campfires at great distances apart, and strange, shaggy herds with tinkling bells on the leaders, and in the wildest part of this hilly country, so remote that few men could ever have seen it, he found a hideously ancient wall or causeway of stone zigzagging along the ridges and valleys; too gigantic ever to have risen by human hands, and of such a length that neither end of it could be seen. Beyond that wall in the gray dawn he came to a land of quaint gardens and cherry trees, and when the sun rose he beheld such beauty of red and white flowers, green foliage and lawns, white paths, diamond brooks, blue lakelets, carven bridges, and red-roofed pagodas, that he for a moment forgot Celephais in sheer delight. But he remembered it again when he walked down a white path toward a red-roofed pagoda, and would have questioned the people of this land about it, had he not found that there were no people there, but only birds and bees and butterflies.

On another night Kuranes walked up a damp stone spiral stairway endlessly, and came to a tower window overlooking a mighty plain and river lit by the full moon; and in the silent city that spread away from the river bank he thought he beheld some feature or arrangement which he had known before. He would have descended and asked the way to Ooth-Nargai had not a fearsome aurora sputtered up from some remote place beyond the horizon, showing the ruin and antiquity of the city, and the stagnation of the reedy river, and the death lying upon that land, as it had lain since King Kynaratholis came home from his conquests to find the vengeance of the gods.

So Kuranes sought fruitlessly for the marvelous city of Celephais and its galleys that sail to Serannian in the sky, meanwhile seeing many wonders and once barely escaping from the high-priest not to be described, which wears a yellow silken mask over its face and dwells all alone in a prehistoric stone monastery in the cold desert plateau of Leng. In time he grew so impatient of the bleak intervals of day that he began buying drugs in order to

increase his periods of sleep. Hasheesh helped a great deal, and once sent him to a part of space where form does not exist, but where glowing gasses study the secrets of existence. And a violet-colored gas told him that this part of space was outside what he had called infinity. The gas had not heard of planets and organisms before, but identified Kuranes merely as one from the infinity where matter, energy, and gravitation exist.

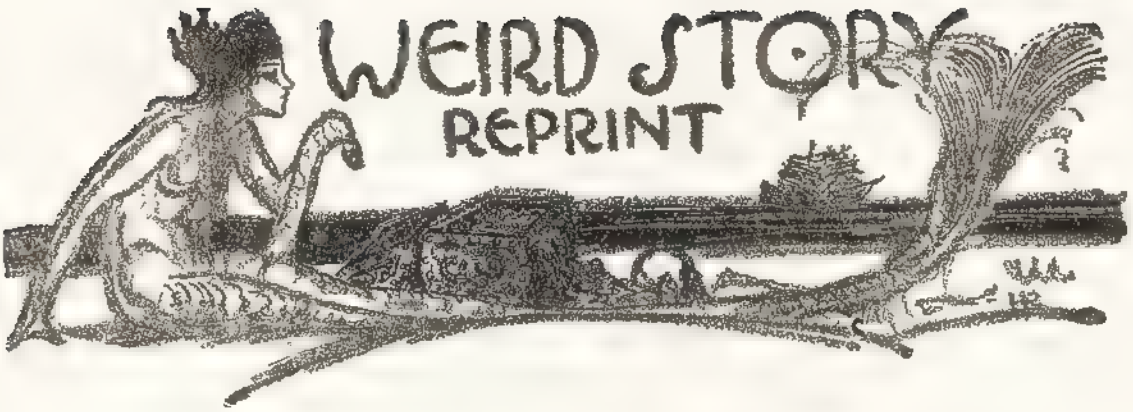
KURANES was now very anxious to return to minaret-studded Celephais, and increased his doses of drugs; but eventually he had no more money left, and could buy no drugs. Then one summer day he was turned out of his garret, and wandered aimlessly through the streets, drifting over a bridge to a place where the houses grew thinner and thinner. And it was there that fulfilment came, and he met the cortege of knights come from Celephais to bear him thither for ever.

Handsome knights they were, astride roan horses and clad in shining armor with tabards of cloth-of-gold curiously emblazoned. So numerous were they, that Kuranes almost mistook them for an army, but they were sent in his honor; since it was he who had created Ooth-Nargai in his dreams, on which account he was now to be appointed its chief god for evermore. Then they gave Kuranes a horse and placed him at the head of the cavalcade, and all rode majestically through the downs of Surrey and onward toward the region where Kuranes and his ancestors were born.

It was very strange, but as the riders went on they seemed to gallop back through Time; for whenever they passed through a village in the twilight they saw only such houses and villagers as Chaucer or men before him might have seen, and sometimes they saw knights on horseback with small companies of retainers. When it grew dark they traveled more swiftly, till soon they were flying uncannily as if in the air. In the dim dawn they came upon the village which Kuranes had seen alive in his childhood, and asleep or dead in his dreams. It was alive now, and early villagers curtsied as the horsemen clattered down the street and turned off into the lane that ends in the abyss of dreams.

Kuranes had previously entered that abyss only at night, and wondered what it would look like by day; so he watched anxiously as the column approached its brink. Just as they galloped up the rising ground to the precipice a golden glare came somewhere out of the west and hid all the landscape in effulgent draperies. The abyss was a seething chaos of roseate and cerulean splendor, and invisible voices sang exultantly as the knightly entourage plunged over the edge and floated gracefully down past glittering clouds and silvery coruscations. Endlessly down the horsemen floated, their chargers pawing the æther as if galloping over golden sands; and then the luminous vapors spread apart to reveal a greater brightness, the brightness of the city Celephais, and the sea-coast beyond, and the snowy peak overlooking the sea, and the gayly painted galleys that sail out of the harbor toward distant regions where the sea meets the sky.

And Kuranes reigned thereafter over Ooth-Nargai and all the neighboring regions of dream, and held his court alternately in Celephais and in the cloud-fashioned Serannian. He reigns there still, and will reign happily for ever; though below the cliffs at Innsmouth the channel tides played mockingly with the body of a tramp who had stumbled through the half-deserted village at dawn; played mockingly, and cast it upon the rocks by ivy-covered Trevor Towers, where a notably fat and especially offensive millionaire brewer enjoys the purchased atmosphere of extinct nobility.



Imprisoned with the Pharaohs

By HOUDINI

Harry Houdini, escape artist and one of the greatest magicians of all time, dictated the facts of this exciting experience to a public stenographer in the dressing-room of the theatre where he was playing, one night fifteen years ago. But though the events were narrated by Houdini, and the printer's proofs were all O.K.'d by him, the actual writing was done by the late great master of weird fiction, H. P. Lovecraft.

MYSTERY attracts mystery. Ever since the wide appearance of my name as a performer of unexplained feats, I have encountered strange narratives and events which my calling has led people to link with my interests and activities. Some of these have been trivial and irrelevant, some deeply dramatic and absorbing, some productive of weird and perilous experiences and some involving me in extensive scientific and historical research. Many of these matters I have told and shall continue to tell very freely; but there is one of which I speak with great reluctance, and which I am now relating only after a session of grilling persuasion from the publishers of this magazine, who had heard vague rumors of it from other members of my family.

The hitherto guarded subject pertains to my non-professional visit to Egypt fourteen years ago, and has been avoided by me for several reasons. For one thing, I am averse to exploiting certain unmistakably actual facts and conditions obviously unknown to the myriad tourists who throng about the pyramids and apparently secreted with much diligence by the authorities at Cairo, who cannot be wholly ignorant of them. For another thing, I dislike to recount an incident in which my own fantastic imagination must have played so

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great a part. What I saw—or thought I saw—certainly did not take place; but is rather to be viewed as a result of my then recent readings in Egyptology, and of the speculations anent this theme which my environment naturally prompted. These imaginative stimuli, magnified by the excitement of an actual event terrible enough in itself, undoubtedly gave rise to the culminating horror of that grotesque night so long past.

IN January, 1910, I had finished a professional engagement in England and signed a contract for a tour of Australian theatres. A liberal time being allowed for the trip, I determined to make the most of it in the sort of travel which chiefly interests me; so accompanied by my wife I drifted pleasantly down the Continent and embarked at Marseilles on the P. & O. Steamer *Malwa,* bound for Port Said. From that point I proposed to visit the principal historical localities of lower Egypt before leaving finally for Australia.

The voyage was an agreeable one, and enlivened by many of the amusing incidents which befall a magical performer apart from his work. I had intended, for the sake of quiet travel, to keep my name a secret; but was goaded into betraying myself by a fellow-magician whose anxiety to astound the passengers with ordinary tricks tempted me to duplicate and exceed his feats in a manner quite destructive of my incognito. I mention this because of its ultimate effect—an effect I should have foreseen before unmasking to a shipload of tourists about to scatter throughout the Nile valley. What it did was to herald my identity wherever I subsequently went, and deprive my wife and me of all the placid inconspicuousness we had sought. Traveling to seek curiosities, I was often forced to stand inspection as a sort of curiosity myself!

We had come to Egypt in search of the picturesque and the mystically impressive, but found little enough when the ship edged up to Port Said and discharged its passengers in small boats. Low dunes of sand, bobbing buoys in shallow water, and a drearily European small town with nothing of interest save the great De Lesseps statue, made us anxious to get on to something more worth our while. After some discussion we decided to proceed at once to Cairo and the Pyramids, later going to Alexandria for the Australian boat and for whatever Greco-Roman sights that ancient metropolis might present.

The railway journey was tolerable enough, and consumed only four hours and a half. We saw much of the Suez Canal, whose route we followed as far as Ismailiya and later had a taste of Old Egypt in our glimpse of the restored fresh-water canal of the Middle Empire. Then at last we saw Cairo glimmering through the growing dusk; a twinkling constellation which became a blaze as we halted at the great Gare Centrale.

But once more disappointment awaited us, for all that we beheld was European save the costumes and the crowds. A prosaic subway led to a square teeming with carriages, taxicabs, and trolley-cars and gorgeous with electric lights shining on tall buildings; whilst the very theatre where I was vainly requested to play and which I later attended as a spectator, had recently been renamed the "American Cosmograph." We stopped at Shepherd's Hotel, reached in a taxi that sped along broad, smartly built-up streets; and amidst the perfect service of its restaurant, elevators and generally Anglo-American luxuries the mysterious East and immemorial past seemed very far away.

The next day, however, precipitated us delightfully into the heart of the *Arabian Nights* atmosphere; and in the winding ways and exotic skyline of Cairo, the Bagdad of Harun-al-Rashid seemed to live

again. Guided by our Baedeker, we had struck east past the Ezbekiyeh Gardens along the Mouski in quest of the native quarter, and were soon in the hands of a clamorous cicerone who—notwithstanding later developments—was assuredly a master at his trade.

Not until afterward did I see that I should have applied at the hotel for a licensed guide. This man, a shaven, peculiarly hollow-voiced and relatively cleanly fellow who looked like a Pharaoh and called himself "Abdul Reis el Drogman," appeared to have much power over others of his kind; though subsequently the police professed not to know him, and to suggest that *reis* is merely a name for any person in authority, whilst "Drogman" is obviously no more than a clumsy modification of the word for a leader of tourist parties—*dragoman.*

Abdul led us among such wonders as we had before only read and dreamed of. Old Cairo is itself a story-book and a dream—labyrinths of narrow alleys redolent of aromatic secrets; Arabesque balconies and oriels nearly meeting above the cobbled streets; maelstroms of Oriental traffic with strange cries, cracking whips, rattling carts, jingling money, and braying donkeys; kaleidoscopes of polychrome robes, veils, turbans, and tarbushes; water-carriers and dervishes, dogs and cats, soothsayers and barbers; and over all the whining of blind beggars crouched in alcoves, and the sonorous chanting of muezzins from minarets limned delicately against a sky of deep, unchanging blue.

The roofed, quieter bazars were hardly less alluring. Spice, perfume, incense beads, rugs, silks, and brass—old Mahmoud Suleiman squats cross-legged amidst his gummy bottles while chattering youths pulverize mustard in the hollowed-out capital of an ancient classic column—a Roman Corinthian, perhaps from neighboring Heliopolis, where Augustus stationed one of his three Egyptian legions. Antiquity begins to mingle with exoticism. And then the mosques and the museum—we saw them all, and tried not to let our Arabian revel succumb to the darker charm of Pharaonic Egypt which the museum's priceless treaures offered. That was to be our climax, and for the present we concentrated on the mediæval Saracenic glories of the Califs whose magnificent tomb-mosques form a glittering faery necropolis on the edge of the Arabian Desert.

At length Abdul took us along the Sharia Mohammed Ali to the ancient mosque of Sultan Hassan, and the towel-flanked Bab-el-Azab, beyond which climbs the steep-walled pass to the mighty citadel that Saladin himself built with the stones of forgotten pyramids. It was sunset when we scaled that cliff, circled the modern mosque of Mohammed Ali, and looked down from the dizzy parapet over mystic Cairo—mystic Cairo all golden with its carven domes, its ethereal minarets and its flaming gardens.

Far over the city towered the great Roman dome of the new museum; and beyond it—across the cryptic yellow Nile that is the mother of eons and dynasties—lurked the menacing sands of the Libyan Desert, undulant and iridescent and evil with older arcana.

The red sun sank low, bringing the relentless chill of Egyptian dusk; and as it stood poised on the world's rim like that ancient god of Heliopolis—Re-Harakhte, the Horizon-Sun—we saw silhouetted against its vermeil holocaust the black outlines of the Pyramids of Gizeh—the palæogean tombs that were hoary with a thousand years when Tut-Ankh-Amen mounted his golden throne in distant Thebes. Then we knew that we were done with Saracen Cairo, and that we must taste the deeper mysteries of primal Egypt—the black Kem of Re and Amen, Isis and Osiris.

THE next morning we visited the Pyramids, riding out in a Victoria across the great Nile bridge with its bronze lions, the island of Ghizereh with its massive lebbakh trees, and the smaller English bridge to the western shore. Down the shore road we drove, between great rows of lebbakhs and past the vast Zoological Gardens to the suburb of Gizeh, where a new bridge to Cairo proper has since been built. Then, turning inland along the Sharia-el-Haram, we crossed a region of glassy canals and shabby native villages till before us loomed the objects of our quest, cleaving the mists of dawn and forming inverted replicas in the roadside pools. Forty centuries, as Napoleon had told his campaigners there, indeed looked down upon us.

The road now rose abruptly, till we finally reached our place of transfer between the trolley station and the Mena House Hotel. Abdul Reis, who capably purchased our Pyramid tickets, seemed to have an understanding with the crowding, yelling and offensive Bedouins who inhabited a squalid mud village some distance away and pestiferously assailed every traveler; for he kept them very decently at bay and secured an excellent pair of camels for us, himself mounting a donkey and assigning the leadership of our animals to a group of men and boys more expensive than useful. The area to be traversed was so small that camels were hardly needed, but we did not regret adding to our experience this troublesome form of desert navigation.

The Pyramids stand on a high rock plateau, this group forming next to the northernmost of the series of regal and aristocratic cemeteries built in the neighborhood of the extinct capital Memphis, which lay on the same side of the Nile, somewhat south of Gizeh, and which flourished between 3400 and 2000 B. C. The greatest pyramid, which lies nearest the modern road, was built by King Cheops or Khufu about 2800 B. C., and stands more than 450 feet in perpendicular height. In a line southwest from this are successively the Second Pyramid, built a generation later by King Khephren, and though slightly smaller, looking even larger because set on higher ground, and the radically smaller Third Pyramid of King Mycerinus, built about 2700 B. C. Near the edge of the plateau and due east of the Second Pyramid, with a face probably altered to form a colossal portrait of Khephren, its royal restorer, stands the monstrous Sphinx—mute, sardonic, and wise beyond mankind and memory.

Minor pyramids and the traces of ruined minor pyramids are found in several places, and the whole plateau is pitted with the tombs of dignitaries of less than royal rank. These latter were originally marked by *mastabas,* or stone bench-like structures above the deep burial shafts, as found in other Memphian cemeteries and exemplified by Perneb's Tomb in the Metropolitan Museum of New York. At Gizeh, however, all such visible things have been swept away by time and pillage; and only the rock-hewn shafts, either sand-filled or cleared out by archeologists, remain to attest their former existence. Connected with each tomb was a chapel in which priests and relatives offered food and prayer to the hovering *ka* or vital principle of the deceased. The small tombs have their chapels contained in their stone *mastabas* or superstructures, but the mortuary chapels of the pyramids, where regal Pharaohs lay, were separate temples, each to the east of its corresponding pyramid, and connected by a causeway to a massive gate-chapel or propylon at the edge of the rock plateau.

The gate-chapel leading to the Second Pyramid, nearly buried in the drifting sands, yawns subterraneously southeast of the Sphinx. Persistent tradition dubs it the "Temple of the Sphinx"; and it may

perhaps be rightly called such if the Sphinx indeed represents the Second Pyramid's builder Khephren. There are unpleasant tales of the Sphinx before Khephren—but whatever its elder features were, the monarch replaced them with his own that men might look at the colossus without fear.

It was in the great gateway-temple that the life-size diorite statue of Khephren now in the Cairo museum was found; a statue before which I stood in awe when I beheld it. Whether the whole edifice is now excavated I am not certain, but in 1910 most of it was below ground, with the entrance heavily barred at night. Germans were in charge of the work, and the war or other things may have stopped them. I would give much, in view of my experience and of certain Bedouin whisperings discredited or unknown in Cairo, to know what has developed in connection with a certain well in a transverse gallery where statues of the Pharaoh were found in curious juxtaposition to the statues of baboons.

The road, as we traversed it on our camels that morning, curved sharply past the wooden police quarters, post office, drug store and shops on the left, and plunged south and east in a complete bend that scaled the rock plateau and brought us face to face with the desert under the lee of the Great Pyramid. Past Cyclopean masonry we rode, rounding the eastern face and looking down ahead into a valley of minor pyramids beyond which the eternal Nile glistened to the east, and the eternal desert shimmered to the west. Very close loomed the three major pyramids, the greatest devoid of outer casing and showing its bulk of great stones, but the others retaining here and there the neatly fitted covering which had made them smooth and finished in their day.

Presently we descended toward the Sphinx, and sat silent beneath the spell of those terrible unseeing eyes. On the vast stone breast we faintly discerned the emblem of Re-Harakhte, for whose image the Sphinx was mistaken in a late dynasty; and though sand covered the tablet between the great paws, we recalled what Thutmosis IV inscribed thereon, and the dream he had when a prince. It was then that the smile of the Sphinx vaguely displeased us, and made us wonder about the legends of subterranean passages beneath the monstrous creature, leading down, down, to depths none might dare hint at—depths connected with mysteries older than the dynastic Egypt we excavate, and having a sinister relation to the persistence of abnormal, animal-headed gods in the ancient Nilotic pantheon. Then, too, it was I asked myself an idle question whose hideous significance was not to appear for many an hour.

OTHER tourists now began to overtake us, and we moved on to the sand-choked Temple of the Sphinx, fifty yards to the southeast, which I have previously mentioned as the great gate of the causeway to the Second Pyramid's mortuary chapel on the plateau. Most of it was still underground, and although we dismounted and descended through a modern passageway to its alabaster corridor and pillared hall, I felt that Abdul and the local German attendant had not shown us all there was to see.

After this we made the conventional circuit of the pyramid plateau, examining the Second Pyramid and the peculiar ruins of its mortuary chapel to the east, the Third Pyramid and its miniature southern satellites and ruined eastern chapel, the rock tombs and honeycombings of the Fourth and Fifth dynasties, and the famous Campbell's Tomb whose shadowy shaft sinks precipitously for fifty-three feet to a sinister sarcophagus which one of our camel-drivers divested of the cumbering sand after a vertiginous descent by rope.

Cries now assailed us from the Great Pyramid, where Bedouins were besieging a party of tourists with offers of speed in the performance of solitary trips up and down. Seven minutes is said to be the record for such an ascent and descent, but many lusty sheiks and sons of sheiks assured us they could cut it to five if given the requisite impetus of liberal *baksheesh.* They did not get this impetus, though we did let Abdul take us up, thus obtaining a view of unprecedented magnificence which included not only remote and glittering Cairo with its crowned citadel and background of gold-violet hills, but all the pyramids of the Memphian district, as well, from Abu Roash on the north to the Dashur on the south. The Sakkara step-pyramid, which marks the evolution of the low *mastaba* into the true pyramid, showed clearly and alluringly in the sandy distance. It is close to this transition-monument that the famed Tomb of Perneb was found—more than four hundred miles north of the Theban rock valley where Tut-Ankh-Amen sleeps. Again I was forced to silence through sheer awe. The prospect of such antiquity, and the secrets each hoary monument seemed to hold and brood over, filled me with a reverence and sense of immensity nothing else ever gave me.

Fatigued by our climb, and disgusted with the importunate Bedouins whose actions seemed to defy every rule of taste, we omitted the arduous detail of entering the cramped interior passages of any of the pyramids, though we saw several of the hardiest tourists preparing for the suffocating crawl through Cheops' mightiest memorial. As we dismissed and overpaid our local bodyguard and drove back to Cairo with Abdul Reis under the afternoon sun, we half regretted the omission we had made. Such fascinating things were whispered about lower pyramid passages not in the guide books; passages whose entrances had been hastily blocked up and concealed by certain uncommunicative archeologists who had found and begun to explore them.

Of course, this whispering was largely baseless on the face of it; but it was curious to reflect how persistently visitors were forbidden to enter the Pyramids at night, or to visit the lowest burrows and crypt of the Great Pyramid. Perhaps in the latter case it was the psychological effect which was feared—the effect on the visitor of feeling himself huddled down beneath a gigantic world of solid masonry; joined to the life he has known by the merest tube, in which he may only crawl, and which any accident or evil design might block. The whole subject seemed so weird and alluring that we resolved to pay the pyramid plateau another visit at the earliest possible opportunity. For me this opportunity came much earlier than I expected.

That evening, the members of our party feeling somewhat tired after the strenuous program of the day, I went alone with Abdul Reis for a walk through the picturesque Arab quarter. Though I had seen it by day, I wished to study the alleys and bazars in the dusk, when rich shadows and mellow gleams of light would add to their glamor and fantastic illusion. The native crowds were thinning, but were still very noisy and numerous when we came upon a knot of reveling Bedouins in the Suken-Nahhasin, or bazar of the coppersmiths. Their apparent leader, an insolent youth with heavy features and saucily cocked tarbush, took some notice of us, and evidently recognized with no great friendliness my competent but admittedly supercilious and sneeringly disposed guide.

Perhaps, I thought, he resented that odd reproduction of the Sphinx's half-smile which I had often remarked with amused irritation; or perhaps he did not like the hollow and sepulchral resonance of Abdul's voice. At any rate, the exchange of ancestrally opprobrious language became very brisk; and before long Ali Ziz, as I

heard the stranger called when called by no worse name, began to pull violently at Abdul's robe, an action quickly reciprocated and leading to a spirited scuffle in which both combatants lost their sacredly cherished head-gear and would have reached an even direr condition had I not intervened and separated them by main force.

My interference, at first seemingly unwelcome on both sides, succeeded at last in effecting a truce. Sullenly each belligerent composed his wrath and his attire, and with an assumption of dignity as profound as it was sudden, the two formed a curious pact of honor which I soon learned is a custom of great antiquity in Cairo—a pact for the settlement of their difference by means of a nocturnal fist fight atop the Great Pyramid, long after the departure of the last moonlight sightseer. Each duellist was to assemble a party of seconds, and the affair was to begin at midnight, proceeding by rounds in the most civilized possible fashion.

In all this planning there was much which excited my interest. The fight itself promised to be unique and spectacular, while the thought of the scene on that hoary pile overlooking the antediluvian plateau of Gizeh under the wan moon of the pallid small hours appealed to every fiber of imagination in me. A request found Abdul exceedingly willing to admit me to his party of seconds; so that all the rest of the early evening I accompanied him to various dens in the most lawless regions of the town—mostly northeast of the Ezbekiyeh—where he gathered one by one a select and formidable band of congenial cutthroats as his pugilistic background.

SHORTLY after nine our party, mounted on donkeys bearing such royal or tourist-reminiscent names as "Rameses," "Mark Twain," "J. P. Morgan," and "Minnehaha," edged through street labyrinths both Oriental and Occidental, crossed the muddy and mast-forested Nile by the bridge of the bronze lions, and cantered philosophically between the lebbakhs on the road to Gizeh. Slightly over two hours were consumed by the trip, toward the end of which we passed the last of the returning tourists, saluted the last inbound trolley-car, and were alone with the night and the past and the spectral moon.

Then we saw the vast pyramids at the end of the avenue, ghoulish with a dim atavistical menace which I had not seemed to notice in the daytime. Even the smallest of them held a hint of the ghastly—for was it not in this that they had buried Queen Nitocris alive in the Sixth Dynasty; subtle Queen Nitocris, who once invited all her enemies to a feast in a temple below the Nile, and drowned them by opening the water-gates? I recalled that the Arabs whisper things about Nitocris, and shun the Third Pyramid at certain phases of the moon. It must have been over her that Thomas Moore was brooding when he wrote of a thing muttered about by Memphian boatmen:

> "The subterranean nymph that dwells
> 'Mid sunless gems and glories hid—
> The lady of the Pyramid!"

Early as we were, Ali Ziz and his party were ahead of us; for we saw their donkeys outlined against the desert plateau at Kafr-el-Haram; toward which squalid Arab settlement, close to the Sphinx, we had diverged instead of following the regular road to the Mena House, where some of the sleepy, inefficient police might have observed and halted us. Here, where filthy Bedouins stabled camels and donkeys in the rock tombs of Khephren's courtiers, we were led up the rocks and over the sand to the Great Pyramid, up whose time-worn sides the Arabs swarmed eagerly. Abdul Reis offering me the assistance I did not need.

As most travelers know, the actual apex

of this structure has long been worn away, leaving a reasonably flat platform twelve yards square. On this eery pinnacle a squared circle was formed, and in a few moments the sardonic desert moon leered down upon a battle which, but for the quality of the ringside cries, might well have occurred at some minor athletic club in America. As I watched it, I felt that some of our less desirable institutions were not lacking; for every blow, feint, and defense bespoke "stalling" to my not inexperienced eye. It was quickly over, and despite my misgivings as to methods I felt a sort of proprietary pride when Abdul Reis was adjudged the winner.

Reconciliation was phenomenally rapid, and amidst the singing, fraternizing and drinking which followed, I found it difficult to realize that a quarrel had ever occurred. Oddly enough, I myself seemed to be more of a center of notice than the antagonists; and from my smattering of Arabic I judged that they were discussing my professional performances and escapes from every sort of manacle and confinement, in a manner which indicated not only a surprising knowledge of me, but a distinct hostility and skepticism concerning my feats of escape. It gradually dawned on me that the elder magic of Egypt did not depart without leaving traces, and that fragments of a strange secret lore and priestly cult-practises have survived surreptitiously amongst the fellaheen to such an extent that the prowess of a strange *habwi* or magician is resented and disputed. I thought of how much my hollow-voiced guide Abdul Reis looked like an old Egyptian priest or Pharaoh or smiling Sphinx . . . and wondered.

Suddenly something happened which in a flash proved the correctness of my reflections and made me curse the denseness whereby I had accepted this night's events as other than the empty and malicious "frame-up" they now showed themselves to be. Without warning, and doubtless in answer to some subtle sign from Abdul, the entire band of Bedouins precipitated itself upon me; and having produced heavy ropes, soon had me bound as securely as I was ever bound in the course of my life, either on the stage or off.

I struggled at first, but soon saw that one man could make no headway against a band of over twenty sinewy barbarians. My hands were tied behind my back, my knees bent to their fullest extent, and my wrists and ankles stoutly linked together with unyielding cords. A stifling gag was forced into my mouth, and a blindfold fastened tightly over my eyes. Then, as the Arabs bore me aloft on their shoulders and began a jouncing descent of the pyramid, I heard the taunts of my late guide Abdul, who mocked and jeered delightedly in his hollow voice, and assured me that I was soon to have my "magic powers" put to a supreme test which would quickly remove any egotism I might have gained through triumphing over all the tests offered by America and Europe. Egypt, he reminded me, is very old, and full of inner mysteries and antique powers not even conceivable to the experts of today, whose devices had so uniformly failed to entrap me.

HOW far or in what direction I was carried, I cannot tell; for the circumstances were all against the formation of any accurate judgment. I know, however, that it could not have been a great distance; since my bearers at no point hastened beyond a walk, yet kept me aloft a surprisingly short time. It is this perplexing brevity which makes me feel almost like shuddering whenever I think of Gizeh and its plateau—for one is oppressed by hints of the closeness to everyday tourist routes of what existed then and must exist still.

The evil abnormality I speak of did not become manifest at first. Setting me down on a surface which I recognized as sand

rather than rock, my captors passed a rope around my chest and dragged me a few feet to a ragged opening in the ground, into which they presently lowered me with much rough handling. For apparent eons I bumped against the stony irregular sides of a narrow hewn well which I took to be one of the numerous burial-shafts of the plateau until the prodigious, almost incredible depth of it robbed me of all bases of conjecture.

The horror of the experience deepened with every dragging second. That any descent through the sheer solid rock could be so vast without reaching the core of the planet itself, or that any rope made by man could be so long as to dangle me in these unholy and seemingly fathomless profundities of nether earth, were beliefs of such grotesqueness that it was easier to doubt my agitated senses than to accept them. Even now I am uncertain, for I know how deceitful the sense of time becomes when one or more of the usual perceptions or conditions of life is removed or distorted. But I am quite sure that I preserved a logical consciousness that far; that at least I did not add any full-grown phantoms of imagination to a picture hideous enough in its reality, and explicable by a type of cerebral illusion vastly short of actual hallucination.

All this was not the cause of my first bit of fainting. The shocking ordeal was cumulative, and the beginning of the later terrors was a very perceptible increase in my rate of descent. They were paying out that infinitely long rope very swiftly now, and I scraped cruelly against the rough and constricted sides of the shaft as I shot madly downward. My clothing was in tatters, and I felt the trickle of blood all over, even above the mounting and excruciating pain. My nostrils, too, were assailed by a scarcely definable menace; a creeping odor of damp and staleness curiously unlike anything I had ever smelt before, and having faint overtones of spice and incense that lent an element of mockery.

Then the mental cataclysm came. It was horrible—hideous beyond all articulate description because it was all of the soul, with nothing of detail to describe. It was the ecstasy of nightmare and the summation of the fiendish. The suddenness of it was apocalyptic and demoniac—one moment I was plunging agonizedly down that narrow well of million-toothed torture, yet the next moment I was soaring on bat-wings in the gulfs of hell; swinging free and swoopingly through illimitable miles of boundless, musty space; rising dizzily to measureless pinnacles of chilling ether, then diving gaspingly to sucking nadirs of ravenous, nauseous lower vacua. . . . Thank God for the mercy that shut out in oblivion those clawing Furies of consciousness which half unhinged my faculties, and tore harpy-like at my spirit! That one respite, short as it was, gave me the strength and sanity to endure those still greater sublimations of cosmic panic that lurked and gibbered on the road ahead.

IT WAS very gradually that I regained my senses after that eldritch flight through stygian space. The process was infinitely painful, and colored by fantastic dreams in which my bound and gagged condition found singular embodiment. The precise nature of these dreams was very clear while I was experiencing them, but became blurred in my recollection almost immediately afterward, and was soon reduced to the merest outline by the terrible events—real or imaginary—which followed. I dreamed that I was in the grasp of a great and horrible paw; a yellow, hairy, five-clawed paw which had reached out of the earth to crush and engulf me. And when I stopped to reflect what the paw was, it seemed to me that it was Egypt. In the

dream I looked back at the events of the preceding weeks, and saw myself lured and enmeshed little by little, subtly and insidiously, by some hellish ghoul-spirit of the elder Nile sorcery; some spirit that was in Egypt before ever man was, and that will be when man is no more.

I saw the horror and unwholesome antiquity of Egypt, and the grisly alliance it has always had with the tombs and temples of the dead. I saw phantom processions of priests with the heads of bulls, falcons, cats, and ibises; phantom processions marching interminably through subterraneous labyrinths and avenues of titanic propylæa beside which a man is as a fly, and offering unnamable sacrifice to indescribable gods. Stone colossi marched in endless night and drove herds of grinning androsphinxes down to the shores of illimitable stagnant rivers of pitch. And behind it all I saw the ineffable malignity of primordial necromancy, black and amorphous, and fumbling greedily after me in the darkness to choke out the spirit that had dared to mock it by emulation.

In my sleeping brain there took shape a melodrama of sinister hatred and pursuit, and I saw the black soul of Egypt singling me out and calling me in inaudible whispers; calling and luring me, leading me on with the glitter and glamor of a Saracenic surface, but ever pulling me down to the age-mad catacombs and horrors of its *dead* and abysmal pharaonic heart.

Then the dream-faces took on human resemblances, and I saw my guide Abdul Reis in the robes of a king, with the sneer of the Sphinx on his features. And I knew that those features were the features of Khephren the Great, who raised the Second Pyramid, carved over the Sphinx's face in the likeness of his own and built that titanic gateway temple whose myriad corridors the archeologists think they have dug out of the cryptical sand and the uninformative rock. And I looked at the long, lean, rigid hand of Khephren; the long, lean, rigid hand as I had seen it on the diorite statue in the Cairo Museum—the statue they had found in the terrible gateway temple—and wondered that I had not shrieked when I saw it on Abdul Reis. . . . That hand! It was hideously cold, and it was crushing me; it was the cold and cramping of the sarcophagus . . . the chill and constriction of unrememberable Egypt. . . . It was nighted, necropolitan Egypt itself . . . that yellow paw . . . and they whisper such things of Khephren. . . .

But at this juncture I began to awake—or at least, to assume a condition less completely that of sleep than the one just preceding. I recalled the fight atop the pyramid, the treacherous Bedouins and their attack, my frightful descent by rope through endless rock depths, and my mad swinging and plunging in a chill void redolent of aromatic putrescence. I perceived that I now lay on a damp rock floor, and that my bonds were still biting into me with unloosened force. It was very cold, and I seemed to detect a faint current of noisome air sweeping across me. The cuts and bruises I had received from the jagged sides of the rock shaft were paining me wofully, their soreness enhanced to a stinging or burning acuteness by some pungent quality in the faint draft, and the mere act of rolling over was enough to set my whole frame throbbing with untold agony.

As I turned I felt a tug from above, and concluded that the rope whereby I was lowered still reached to the surface. Whether or not the Arabs still held it, I had no idea; nor had I any idea how far within the earth I was. I knew that the darkness around me was wholly or nearly total, since no ray of moonlight penetrated my blindfold; but I did not trust my senses enough to accept as evidence of extreme depth the sensation of vast duration which had characterized my descent.

Knowing at least that I was in a space of

considerable extent reached from the surface directly above by an opening in the rock, I doubtfully conjectured that my prison was perhaps the buried gateway chapel of old Khephren—the Temple of the Sphinx—perhaps some inner corridor which the guides had not shown me during my morning visit, and from which I might easily escape if I could find my way to the barred entrance. It would be a labyrinthine wandering, but no worse than others out of which I had in the past found my way.

The first step was to get free of my bonds, gag, and blindfold; and this I knew would be no great task, since subtler experts than these Arabs had tried every known species of fetter upon me during my long and varied career as an exponent of escape, yet had never succeeded in defeating my methods.

Then it occurred to me that the Arabs might be ready to meet and attack me at the entrance upon any evidence of my probable escape from the binding cords, as would be furnished by any decided agitation of the rope which they probably held. This, of course, was taking for granted that my place of confinement was indeed Khephren's Temple of the Sphinx. The direct opening in the roof, wherever it might lurk, could not be beyond easy reach of the ordinary modern entrance near the Sphinx; if in truth it were any great distance at all on the surface, since the total area known to visitors is not at all enormous. I had not noticed any such opening during my daytime pilgrimage, but knew that these things are easily overlooked amidst the drifting sands.

Thinking these matters over as I lay bent and bound on the rock floor, I nearly forgot the horrors of abysmal descent and cavernous swinging which had so lately reduced me to a coma. My present thought was only to outwit the Arabs, and I accordingly determined to work myself free as quickly as possible, avoiding any tug on the descending line which might betray an effective or even problematical attempt at freedom.

This, however, was more easily determined than effected. A few preliminary trials made it clear that little could be accomplished without considerable motion; and it did not surprise me when, after one especially energetic struggle, I began to feel the coils of falling rope as they piled up about me and upon me. Obviously, I thought, the Bedouins had felt my movements and released their end of the rope; hastening no doubt to the temple's true entrance to lie murderously in wait for me.

The prospect was not pleasing—but I had faced worse in my time without flinching, and would not flinch now. At present I must first of all free myself of bonds, then trust to ingenuity to escape from the temple unharmed. It is curious how implicitly I had come to believe myself in the old temple of Khephren beside the Sphinx, only a short distance below the ground.

THAT belief was shattered, and every pristine apprehension of preternatural depth and demoniac mystery revived, by a circumstance which grew in horror and significance even as I formulated my philosophical plan. I have said that the falling rope was piling up about and upon me. Now I saw that it was continuing to pile, as no rope of normal length could possibly do. It gained in momentum and became an avalanche of hemp, accumulating mountainously on the floor and half burying me beneath its swiftly multiplying coils. Soon I was completely engulfed and gasping for breath as the increasing convolutions submerged and stifled me.

My senses tottered again, and I vainly tried to fight off a menace desperate and ineluctable. It was not merely that I was tortured beyond human endurance—not merely that life and breath seemed to be crushed slowly out of me—it was the

knowledge of what those unnatural lengths of rope implied, and the consciousness of what unknown and incalculable gulfs of inner earth must at this moment be surrounding me. My endless descent and swinging flight through goblin space, then, must have been real, and even now I must be lying helpless in some nameless cavern world toward the core of the planet. Such a sudden confirmation of ultimate horror was insupportable, and a second time I lapsed into merciful oblivion.

When I say oblivion, I do not imply that I was free from dreams. On the contrary, my absence from the conscious world was marked by visions of the most unutterable hideousness. God! . . . If only I had not read so much Egyptology before coming to this land which is the fountain of all darkness and terror! This second spell of fainting filled my sleeping mind anew with shivering realization of the country and its archaic secrets, and through some damnable chance my dreams turned to the ancient notions of the dead and their sojournings in soul and body beyond those mysterious tombs which were more houses than graves. I recalled, in dream-shapes which it is well that I do not remember, the peculiar and elaborate construction of Egyptian sepulchers; and the exceedingly singular and terrific doctrines which determined this construction.

All these people thought of was death and the dead. They conceived of a literal resurrection of the body which made them mummify it with desperate care, and preserve all the vital organs in canopic jars near the corpse; whilst besides the body they believed in two other elements, the soul, which after its weighing and approval by Osiris dwelt in the land of the blest, and the obscure and portentous *ka* or life-principle which wandered about the upper and lower worlds in a horrible way, demanding occasional access to the preserved body, consuming the food offerings brought by priests and pious relatives to the mortuary chapel, and sometimes—as men whispered—taking its body or the wooden double always buried beside it and stalking noxiously abroad on errands peculiarly repellent.

For thousands of years those bodies rested gorgeously encased and staring glassily upward when not visited by the *ka*, awaiting the day when Osiris should restore both *ka* and soul, and lead forth the stiff legions of the dead from their sunken houses of sleep. It was to have been a glorious rebirth—but not all souls were approved, nor were all tombs inviolate, so that certain grotesque *mistakes* and fiendish *abnormalities* were to be looked for. Even today the Arabs murmur of unsanctified convocations and unwholesome worship in forgotten nether abysses, which only winged invisible *kas* and soulless mummies may visit and return unscathed.

Perhaps the most leeringly blood-congealing legends are those which relate to certain perverse products of decadent priestcraft—*composite mummies* made by the artificial union of human trunks and limbs with the heads of animals in imitation of the elder gods. At all stages of history the sacred animals were mummified, so that consecrated bulls, cats, ibises, crocodiles and the like might return some day to greater glory. But only in the decadence did they mix the human and animal in the same mummy—only in the decadence, when they did not understand the rights and prerogatives of the *ka* and the soul.

What happened to those composite mummies is not told of—at least publicly—and it is certain that no Egyptologist ever found one. The whispers of Arabs are very wild, and cannot be relied upon. They even hint that old Khephren—he of the Sphinx, the Second Pyramid and the yawning gateway temple—lives far underground wedded to the ghoul-queen Nito-

cris and ruling over the mummies that are neither of man nor of beast.

It was of these—of Khephren and his consort and his strange armies of the hybrid dead—that I dreamed, and that is why I am glad the exact dream-shapes have faded from my memory. My most horrible vision was connected with an idle question I had asked myself the day before when looking at the great carven riddle of the desert and wondering with what unknown depths the temple close to it might be secretly connected. That question, so innocent and whimsical then, assumed in my dream a meaning of frenetic and hysterical madness . . . *what huge and loathsome abnormality was the Sphinx originally carven to represent?*

MY SECOND awakening—if awakening it was—is a memory of stark hideousness which nothing else in my life—save one thing which came after—can parallel; and that life has been full and adventurous beyond most men's. Remember that I had lost consciousness whilst buried beneath a cascade of falling rope whose immensity revealed the cataclysmic depth of my present position. Now, as perception returned, I felt the entire weight gone; and realized upon rolling over that although I was still tied, gagged and blindfolded, *some agency had removed completely the suffocating hempen landslide which had overwhelmed me.* The significance of this condition, of course, came to me only gradually; but even so I think it would have brought unconsciousness again had I not by this time reached such a state of emotional exhaustion that no new horror could make much difference. I was alone . . . with *what?*

Before I could torture myself with any new reflection, or make any fresh effort to escape from my bonds, an additional circumstance became manifest. Pains not formerly felt were racking my arms and legs, and I seemed coated with a profusion of dried blood beyond anything my former cuts and abrasions could furnish. My chest, too, seemed pierced by a hundred wounds, as though some malign, titanic ibis had been pecking at it. Assuredly the agency which had removed the rope was a hostile one, and had begun to wreak terrible injuries upon me when somehow impelled to desist. Yet at the time my sensations were distinctly the reverse of what one might expect. Instead of sinking into a bottomless pit of despair, I was stirred to new courage and action; for now I felt that the evil forces were physical things which a fearless man might encounter on an even basis.

On the strength of this thought I tugged again at my bonds, and used all the art of a lifetime to free myself as I had so often done amidst the glare of lights and the applause of vast crowds. The familiar details of my escaping process commenced to engross me, and now that the long rope was gone I half regained my belief that the supreme horrors were hallucinations after all, and that there had never been any terrible shaft, measureless abyss or interminable rope. Was I after all in the gateway temple of Khephren beside the Sphinx, and had the sneaking Arabs stolen in to torture me as I lay helpless there? At any rate, I must be free. Let me stand up unbound, ungagged, and with eyes open to catch any glimmer of light which might come trickling from any source, and I could actually delight in the combat against evil and treacherous foes!

How long I took in shaking off my encumbrances I cannot tell. It must have been longer than in my exhibition performances, because I was wounded, exhausted, and enervated by the experiences I had passed through. When I was finally free, and taking deep breaths of a chill, damp, evilly spiced air all the more horrible when encountered without the screen

of gag and blindfold edges, I found that I was too cramped and fatigued to move at once. There I lay, trying to stretch a frame bent and mangled, for an indefinite period, and straining my eyes to catch a glimpse of some ray of light which would give a hint as to my position.

By degrees my strength and flexibility returned, but my eyes beheld nothing. As I staggered to my feet I peered diligently in every direction, yet met only an ebony blackness as great as that I had known when blindfolded. I tried my legs, blood-encrusted beneath my shredded trousers, and found that I could walk; yet could not decide in what direction to go. Obviously I ought not to walk at random, and perhaps retreat directly from the entrance I sought; so I paused to note the direction of the cold, fetid, natron-scented air-current which I had never ceased to feel. Accepting the point of its source as the possible entrance to the abyss, I strove to keep track of this landmark and to walk consistently toward it.

I had a match-box with me, and even a small electric flashlight; but of course the pockets of my tossed and tattered clothing were long since emptied of all heavy articles. As I walked cautiously in the blackness, the draft grew stronger and more offensive, till at length I could regard it as nothing less than a tangible stream of detestable vapor pouring out of some aperture like the smoke of the genie from the fisherman's jar in the Eastern tale. The East . . . Egypt . . . truly, this dark cradle of civilization was ever the well-spring of horrors and marvels unspeakable!

The more I reflected on the nature of this cavern wind, the greater my sense of disquiet became; for although despite its odor I had sought its source as at least an indirect clue to the outer world, I now saw plainly that this foul emanation could have no admixture or connection whatsoever with the clean air of the Libyan Desert, but must be essentially a thing vomited from sinister gulfs still lower down. I had, then, been walking in the wrong direction!

After a moment's reflection I decided not to retrace my steps. Away from the draft I would have no landmarks, for the roughly level rock floor was devoid of distinctive configurations. If, however, I followed up the strange current, I would undoubtedly arrive at an aperture of some sort, from whose gate I could perhaps work round the walls to the opposite side of this Cyclopean and otherwise unnavigable hall. That I might fail, I well realized. I saw that this was no part of Khephren's gateway temple which tourists know, and it struck me that this particular hall might be unknown even to archeologists, and merely stumbled upon by the inquisitive and malignant Arabs who had imprisoned me. If so, was there any present gate of escape to the known parts or to the outer air?

What evidence, indeed, did I now possess that this was the gateway temple at all? For a moment all my wildest speculations rushed back upon me, and I thought of that vivid melange of impressions—descent, suspension in space, the rope, my wounds, and the dreams that were frankly dreams. Was this the end of life for me? Or indeed, would it be merciful if this moment *were* the end? I could answer none of my own questions, but merely kept on, till Fate for a third time reduced me to oblivion.

This time there were no dreams, for the suddenness of the incident shocked me out of all thought either conscious or subconscious. Tripping on an unexpected descending step at a point where the offensive draft became strong enough to offer an actual physical resistance, I was precipitated headlong down a black flight of huge stone stairs into a gulf of hideousness unrelieved.

That I ever breathed again is a tribute to

the inherent vitality of the healthy human organism. Often I look back to that night and feel a touch of actual humor in those repeated lapses of consciousness; lapses whose succession reminded me at the time of nothing more than the crude cinema melodramas of that period. Of course, it is possible that the repeated lapses never occurred; and that all the features of that underground nightmare were merely the dreams of one long coma which began with the shock of my descent into that abyss and ended with the healing balm of the outer air and of the rising sun which found me stretched on the sands of Gizeh before the sardonic and dawn-flushed face of the Great Sphinx.

I prefer to believe this latter explanation as much as I can, hence was glad when the police told me that the barrier to Khephren's gateway temple had been found unfastened, and that a sizable rift to the surface did actually exist in one corner of the still buried part. I was glad, too, when the doctors pronounced my wounds only those to be expected from my seizure, blinding, lowering, struggling with bonds, falling some distance—perhaps into a depression in the temple's inner gallery—dragging myself to the outer barrier and escaping from it, and experiences like that . . . a very soothing diagnosis. And yet I know that there must be more than appears on the surface. That extreme descent is too vivid a memory to be dismissed—and it is odd that no one has ever been able to find a man answering the description of my guide, Abdul Reis el Drogman—the tomb-throated guide who looked and smiled like King Khephren.

I HAVE digressed from my connected narrative—perhaps in the vain hope of evading the telling of that final incident; that incident which of all is most certainly an hallucination. But I promised to relate it, and I do not break promises. When I recovered—or seemed to recover—my senses after that fall down the black stone stairs, I was quite as alone and in darkness as before. The windy stench, bad enough before, was now fiendish; yet I had acquired enough familiarity by this time to bear it stoically. Dazedly I began to crawl away from the place whence the putrid wind came, and with my bleeding hands felt the colossal blocks of a mighty pavement. Once my head struck against a hard object, and when I felt of it I learned that it was the base of a column—a column of unbelievable immensity—whose surface was covered with gigantic chiseled hieroglyphics very perceptible to my touch.

Crawling on, I encountered other titan columns at incomprehensible distances apart; when suddenly my attention was captured by the realization of something which must have been impinging on my subconscious hearing long before the conscious sense was aware of it.

From some still lower chasm in earth's bowels were proceeding certain *sounds*, measured and definite, and like nothing I had ever heard before. That they were very ancient and distinctly ceremonial, I felt almost intuitively; and much reading in Egyptology led me to associate them with the flute, the sambuke, the sistrum, and the tympanum. In their rhythmic piping, droning, rattling and beating I felt an element of terror beyond all the known terrors of earth—a terror peculiarly dissociated from personal fear, and taking the form of a sort of objective pity for our planet, that it should hold within its depths such horrors as must lie behind these ægipanic cacophonies. The sounds increased in volume, and I felt that they were approaching. Then—and may all the gods of all pantheons unite to keep the like from my ears again—I began to hear, faintly and afar off, the morbid and millennial tramping of the marching things.

It was hideous that footfalls so dis-

similar should move in such perfect rhythm. The training of unhallowed thousands of years must lie behind that march of earth's inmost monstrosities . . . padding, clicking, walking, stalking, rumbling, lumbering, crawling . . . and all to the abhorrent discords of those mocking instruments. And then—God keep the memory of those Arab legends out of my head!—the mummies without souls . . . the meeting-place of the wandering *kas* . . . the hordes of the devil-cursed pharaonic dead of forty centuries . . . the *composite mummies* led through the uttermost onyx voids by King Khephren and his ghoul-queen Nitocris. . . .

The tramping drew nearer—Heaven save me from the sound of those feet and paws and hooves and pads and talons as it commenced to acquire detail! Down limitless reaches of sunless pavement a spark of light flickered in the malodorous wind, and I drew behind the enormous circumference of a Cyclopic column that I might escape for a while the horror that was stalking million-footed toward me through gigantic hypostyles of inhuman dread and phobic antiquity. The flickers increased, and the tramping and dissonant rhythm grew sickeningly loud. In the quivering orange light there stood faintly forth a scene of such stony awe that I gasped from a sheer wonder that conquered even fear and repulsion. Bases of columns whose middles were higher than human sight . . . mere bases of things that must each dwarf the Eiffel Tower to insignificance . . . hieroglyphics carved by unthinkable hands in caverns where daylight can be only a remote legend. . . .

I *would not* look at the marching things. That I desperately resolved as I heard their creaking joints and nitrous wheezing above the dead music and the dead tramping. It was merciful that they did not speak . . . but God! *their crazy torches began to cast shadows on the surface of those stupendous columns. Hippopotami should not have human hands and carry torches . . . men should not have the heads of crocodiles. . . .*

I TRIED to turn away, but the shadows and the sounds and the stench were everywhere. Then I remembered something I used to do in half-conscious nightmares as a boy, and began to repeat to myself, "This is a dream! This is a dream!" But it was of no use, and I could only shut my eyes and pray . . . at least, that is what I think I did, for one is never sure in visions—and I know this can have been nothing more. I wondered whether I should ever reach the world again, and at times would furtively open my eyes to see if I could discern any feature of the place other than the wind of spiced putrefaction, the topless columns, and the thaumatropically grotesque shadows of abnormal horror. The sputtering glare of multiplying torches now shone, and unless this hellish place were wholly without walls, I could not fail to see some boundary or fixed landmark soon. But I had to shut my eyes again when I realized how many of the things were assembling—and when I glimpsed a certain object walking solemnly and steadily *without any body above the waist.*

A fiendish and ululant corpse-gurgle or death-rattle now split the very atmosphere—the charnel atmosphere poisonous with naftha and bitumen blasts—in one concerted chorus from the ghoulish legion of hybrid blasphemies. My eyes, perversely shaken open, gazed for an instant upon a sight which no human creature could even imagine without panic fear and physical exhaustion. The things had filed ceremonially in one direction, the direction of the noisome wind, where the light of their torches showed their bended heads—or the bended heads of such as had heads. They were worshipping before a great black fetor-belching aperture which reached up almost out of sight, and which I could see

was flanked at right angles by two giant staircases whose ends were far away in shadow. One of these was indubitably the staircase I had fallen down.

The dimensions of the hole were fully in proportion with those of the columns —an ordinary house would have been lost in it, and any average public building could easily have been moved in and out. It was so vast a surface that only by moving the eye could one trace its boundaries . . . so vast, so hideously black, and so aromatically stinking. . . . Directly in front of this yawning Polyphemus-door the things were throwing objects—evidently sacrifices or religious offerings, to judge by their gestures. Khephren was their leader; sneering King Khephren *or the guide Abdul Reis,* crowned with a golden pshent and intoning endless formulæ with the hollow voice of the dead. By his side knelt beautiful Queen Nitocris, whom I saw in profile for a moment, noting that the right half of her face was eaten away by rats or other ghouls. And I shut my eyes again when I saw what objects were being thrown as offerings to the fetid aperture or its possible local deity.

It occurred to me that, judging from the elaborateness of this worship, the concealed deity must be one of considerable importance. Was it Osiris or Isis, Horus or Anubis, or some vast unknown God of the Dead still more central and supreme? There is a legend that terrible altars and colossi were reared to an Unknown One before ever the known gods were worshipped. . . .

And now, as I steeled myself to watch the rapt and sepulchral adorations of those nameless things, a thought of escape flashed upon me. The hall was dim, and the columns heavy with shadow. With every creature of that nightmare throng absorbed in shocking raptures, it might be barely possible for me to creep past to the far-away end of one of the staircases and ascend unseen; trusting to Fate and skill to deliver me from the upper reaches. Where I was, I neither knew nor seriously reflected upon—and for a moment it struck me as amusing to plan a serious escape from that which I knew to be a dream. Was I in some hidden and unsuspected lower realm of Khephren's gateway temple —that temple which generations have persistently called the Temple of the Sphinx? I could not conjecture, but I resolved to ascend to life and consciousness if wit and muscle could carry me.

WRIGGLING flat on my stomach, I began the anxious journey toward the foot of the left-hand staircase, which seemed the more accessible of the two. I cannot describe the incidents and sensations of that crawl, but they may be guessed when one reflects on what I had to watch steadily in that malign, wind-blown torchlight in order to avoid detection. The bottom of the staircase was, as I have said, far away in shadow, as it had to be to rise without a bend to the dizzy parapeted landing above the titanic aperture. This placed the last stages of my crawl at some distance from the noisome herd, though the spectacle chilled me even when quite remote at my right.

At length I succeeded in reaching the steps and began to climb; keeping close to the wall, on which I observed decorations of the most hideous sort, and relying for safety on the absorbed, ecstatic interest with which the monstrosities watched the foul-breezed aperture and the impious objects of nourishment they had flung on the pavement before it. Though the staircase was huge and steep, fashioned of vast porphyry blocks as if for the feet of a giant, the ascent seemed virtually interminable. Dread of discovery and the pain which renewed exercise had brought to my wounds combined to make that upward crawl a thing of agonizing memory. I had in-

tended, on reaching the landing, to climb immediately onward along whatever upper staircase might mount from there; stopping for no last look at the carrion abominations that pawed and genuflected some seventy or eighty feet below—yet a sudden repetition of that thunderous corpse-gurgle and death-rattle chorus, coming as I had nearly gained the top of the flight and showing by its ceremonial rhythm that it was not an alarm of my discovery, caused me to pause and peer cautiously over the parapet.

The monstrosities were hailing something which had poked itself out of the nauseous aperture to seize the hellish fare proffered it. It was something quite ponderous, even as seen from my height; something yellowish and hairy, and endowed with a sort of nervous motion. It was as large, perhaps, as a good-sized hippopotamus, but very curiously shaped. It seemed to have no neck, but five separate shaggy heads springing in a row from a roughly cylindrical trunk; the first very small, the second good-sized, the third and fourth equal and largest of all, and the fifth rather small, though not so small as the first.

Out of these heads darted curious rigid tentacles which seized ravenously on the excessively great quantities of unmentionable food placed before the aperture. Once in a while the thing would leap up, and occasionally it would retreat into its den in a very odd manner. Its locomotion was so inexplicable that I stared in fascination, wishing it would emerge farther from the cavernous lair beneath me.

Then it *did emerge* . . . it *did* emerge, and at the sight I turned and fled into the darkness up the higher staircase that rose behind me; fled unknowingly up incredible steps and ladders and inclined planes to which no human sight or logic guided me, and which I must ever relegate to the world of dreams for want of any confirmation. It must have been dream, or the dawn would never have found me breathing on the sands of Gizeh before the sardonic dawn-flushed face of the Great Sphinx.

The Great Sphinx! God!—that idle question I asked myself on that sun-blest morning before . . . *what huge and loathsome abnormality was the Sphinx originally carven to represent?* Accursed is the sight, be it in dream or not, that revealed to me the supreme horror—the unknown God of the Dead, which licks its colossal chops in the unsuspected abyss, fed hideous morsels by soulless absurdities that should not exist. The five-headed monster that emerged . . . the five-headed monster as large as a hippopotamus . . . the five-headed monster —*and that of which it is the merest forepaw*. . . .

But I survived, and I know it was only a dream.

THE EYRIE

WE CANNOT repeat too often that you, the readers, are really the editors of this magazine. WEIRD TALES gives you the best weird literature written today, and will continue to do so. But it is only by careful study of your letters to the Eyrie that we are able to determine what you consider the best weird fiction. Each of you who writes in to us becomes thereby an unofficial consulting editor. We value your criticism highly.

Poe and "The Raven"

J. J. O'Connell writes from New York City: "I am a great admirer of Virgil Finlay's illustrations of excerpts from classic weird poetry. Why not have him do them hereafter in full color, on the cover? That is an idea worth acting on. What a cover he could paint of Edgar Allan Poe and his somber Raven 'from the night's Plutonian shore'! Incidentally, you missed a wonderful chance for a marvelous cover by burying the illustration to Edmond Hamilton's *Bride of the Lightning* inside, in black and white—you know, that scene showing the girl dancing, with the spears of the lightning coming at her from all sides." [Your suggestion of a Finlay cover based on Poe's classic interests us. We will ask him to paint this.—THE EDITOR.]

One in a Thousand

Eugene Benefiel writes from Hollywood, California: "Just bought my April issue of WT, and having read Mary Elizabeth Counselman's *Mommy* felt I must write. Without even reading another story in the magazine I vote my monthly quarter well spent for that one tale, and of course the rest of this issue looks very good at first glance. WT is one magazine in a thousand in spite of an occasional poor issue—although I have yet to see any other popular fiction publication that can or will print such great tales with such amazing regularity. I note with satisfaction the return of C. L. Moore to WT. She is one of the best—don't let her get away again. One slight kick: please give the titles of the poems which Finlay illustrates along with his drawings, as has been done for the most part. . . . Thank you again for such a marvelous story as *Mommy*." [The title of the Finlay-illustrated poem by Sidney Lanier in our April issue, about which so many of you have asked, is *How Love Looked for Hell*.—THE EDITOR.]

Dangers of Dabbling

H. J. Schaeffer writes from Reading, Pennsylvania: "Choosing best stories from the April issue is a difficult task, for all are good. And I think it is unfair to mention stories as best unless giving definite reasons for so doing. *Hydra,* a story dealing with the danger of dabbling in occultism, I have chosen as the most instructive, for there is a vast difference between studying occult literature and dabbling in occultism; the former is educative, the latter mostly dangerous. This story is exaggerated; still it gives a warning to the rashly uninformed to leave well enough alone, for without a doubt a large percent of invalids in sanatoriums for mental derangement experimented blindly with similar methods.

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An Outre Air

J. Vernon Shea, Jr., writes from Pittsburgh: "*Hellsgarde* was the most welcome story of the current issue, for it has the qualities one associates with C. L. Moore: beauty of style, an *outré* air, and narrative unpredictability; just the opposite, in fact, of *Susette* — for Quinn's routines are so familiar that a glance at the cover gives the whole story away. . . . Bloch is progressing markedly in technique, although I wish he would restrain his taste for the melodramatic. *The Red Swimmer* was a memorable although grisly bit. I was glad to see at last the long-delayed *Hydra* of Kuttner's, probably the best of his earlier tales. If the new illustrator continues to be as striking as he is in *Hydra*, he may yet give Finlay and Rankin competition. Finlay's page-piece, by the way, maintains his high level. I was considerably startled to see an unfamiliar and unheralded Lovecraft story, *The Wicked Clergyman*. Is it a fragment from a letter describing one of HPL's uncanny dreams? It seems curiously incomplete. Some of the readers should gather with us on Saturday nights at the Werewolf Library, where we play cards and discuss the latest WT, flanked by a hundred-odd weird books and with Manly Wade Wellman's imagined drawing of the library on the wall. There they could pore over Lovecraft letters and old issues of WT, with all those superb stories, and meet in person Mr. and Mrs. Werewolf, less formidable hosts than one might expect. They might even join in the pitched argument over the merits of Seabury Quinn perpetually waged by B. Reagan and the writer."

Dash to the News Stands

Miss Ethel Tucker writes to the Eyrie: "Although this is the first time I've attempted to write to WEIRD TALES, I have been reading it for five years and I think more of it each month. I always anxiously await the first of the month, when I dash to the near-

est news stand for WEIRD TALES, and I have it all read before the day is over; it just seems I can't let it go until each story has been devoured. I'm tickled pink over the 160-page size, as I know many of your faithful readers are. In my opinion *Susette* was a very interesting and absorbing story but definitely not quite as good as some of Seabury Quinn's stories have been; it lacked the expected weird touch. *Hellsgarde* was a superb, grand and everything else kind of story; I loved it to the very last exciting word. The reprint, *The Curse of Yig*, I liked very much; it was truly eery and a bit horribly uncanny at the end. The other story I most liked was *Fearful Rock;* it was very original and witchcrafty and kept me in fingernail-biting suspense all the way. And I don't want to forget to comment on the cover by Virgil Finlay; it was beautiful, as all his work is, in my humble estimation."

Weird Thrills

E. B. Hardy writes from Lewiston, Maine: "Manly Wade Wellman has ended *Fearful Rock* with weird thrills enough to raise the hair on the head of the most hardened reader of eery tales. The only disappointment in the whole story was the failure of the Nameless One to fight it out with our heroes. Mary Elizabeth Counselman has created such an appealing little heroine for *Mommy* that I for one dislike saying good-bye to her. I wish Miss Counselman would tell us more about little Martha and her Mommy and new Mother in future stories."

In the Right Place

Stanley Arnold writes from Frankfort, Indiana: "*The Red God Laughed* is sure in the right place in the April issue—the first story in two ways. The bigger size of the magazine is a treat, and the reprints are very good. I wish you would reprint all of Howard's and Lovecraft's shorter stories, as I don't think anyone can do quite as well as they did. *Hydra* by Kuttner is second best in the April issue, and *The Red Swimmer* third. Finlay is tops in illustrations; so keep him by all means."

Next Issue

SPAWN

By P. Schuyler Miller

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Cluttered Cover

John V. Baltadonis writes from Philadelphia: "'Tis very sad that a superb cover be ruined by too much printing on it. But that's the case with the April issue. You have entirely too many story titles on the cover; one title would be sufficient. Please, don't clutter up future covers with so much printing. . . . I was glad to read *The Curse of Yig* once more. It's really a great story, gruesome and suggesting. It seems that whenever Seabury Quinn writes other than a de Grandin tale, the story always turns out to be first-class. *Susette* (I think short titles are swell!) is no exception. Perhaps if Quinn will let de Grandin have a vacation for some time, when Jules returns he may be refreshed and much more interesting. Hordes of N'Yalothep! but this is one hard issue from which to pick the best story! They're all humdingers! I read with fevered interest Hamilton's sequel, *Armies from the Past,* to his tale of last month. It's one story that is really packed with action. *The Red Swimmer*—horror, suspense, such *schmaltz,* as one author might say. Whene'er I think of Bloch, I think of Kuttner, and that brings me to *Hydra.* Another great story by Kuttner. Keep up the good work, Hank! And C. L. Moore gives us the one and only Jirel of Joiry! Boy! Whatanissue! I hope that C. L. Moore delights us in future issues with more stories of Northwest Smith and Jirel. And now for the one discordant note of the issue,—*Fearful Rock.* Somehow, it doesn't rank with most of the other stories in the issue. I don't like this concluding part nearly as much as the preceding installments. And, among the short stories, Mary Elizabeth Counselman, whose *Three Marked Pennies* will long be remembered, is outstanding with *Mommy.* This is one *swell* issue. After much consultation with myself, I guess I'll have to award a tie for the best story of the issue, with Quinn and Hamilton vying for top honors. But the other stories by Kuttner, Bloch, and Moore are so close behind that I feel rather guilty in selecting *any* story for first place. And to think that I questioned the quality of the stories in your 160-page issues!"

Impossible to Choose

Charles Hidley writes from New York: "Without fear of being corrected, I wish to

say that the illustrations in the March issue by Finlay were the best he has ever done for WEIRD TALES, *The Return of Hastur* being the finest of them all. Stippled, intricate, shadowy, vague, mysterious, suggestive, all these different types of Finlay artistry were embodied in the one issue. The same thing may be said about De Lay. *Fearful Rock,* parts two and three, were very much better than the first of this serial, and also the best of his entire work. . . . The leader among the stories (and I can assure you it was almost an impossibility to choose) was *The Return of Hastur,* followed very closely by *The Quest of Iranon.* The former resembled Lovecraft's style of fiction, but this by no means slights Mr. Derleth's writing. The latter story was truly beautiful. Seabury Quinn's tale of the mad scientist and his *outré* creations was next winner. These first three were so close together in the race that there was really a triumvirate in the leading position. *The Metal Chamber* was intriguing because of the novel plot—thrilling psychological suspense. The not-so-interesting Circe tale was well written, but the reader with any knowledge of mythology knew the climax before actually coming to it. Mr. Ball should write more stories about the aspiring author and the stories told by the wily sea captain. The illustrated poem was interesting, and *Introduction to a Stranger* best poem in the issue."

Page King Kull

Elaine McIntire writes from Malden, Massachusetts: "I actually feel you are a personal friend instead of a name on a magazine page. You do give us thrill-mad fans such nice 'oogy' stories. Look at Jirel of Joiry—she certainly does get around. How about getting her and Northwest Smith to meet again. They did quite some time ago. They should get better acquainted, don't you think? I just *had* to write again, I got such a big kick out of reading *Armies from the Past.* Are we going to have more of those 'swell-elegant' fighters and their crazy army? Hope so; it sounds like a lot of fun. I was rather disappointed in *Susette*—it wasn't 'oogy.' I like my stories nice and 'oogy-woogy' (figure *that* one out!). One more crack and I'll close. The reprinting of the King Kull stories would be very interesting to me because I have never had the opportunity to read about him."

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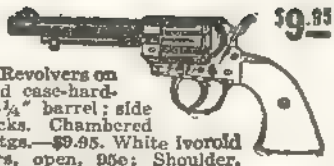

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Two Fine Authors

Raymond M. Treavy writes from Los Angeles: "I have been a reader of WEIRD TALES for twelve years, and there is no magazine on the market today that I have so thoroughly enjoyed. While your authors on the whole have turned out some mighty fine work, I could not help but select two that in my estimation surpassed them all, namely: Seabury Quinn and the late Robert E. Howard. Howard definitely created a character in his Conan that gave one the feeling that he was reading about a real live being, and so does Quinn in his Jules de Grandin. The first stories that I always read were by those two authors, and it was a tragic blow when Howard passed on, for we not only lost him, my favorite of all writers, but that battle-scarred old warrior Conan died with him. So we lost both of them, and I have never entirely reconciled myself to their loss."

Idea for a Story

John Wasso, Jr., writes from Pen Argyl, Pennsylvania: "Why doesn't one of your writers develop a story from the idea of a pagan temple being taken apart in the jungles of Indo-China, brought to the New York World's Fair and reassembled there, piece by piece? And the havoc wrought by a monstrous idol in the temple when the evil entity represented by the idol is inadvertently summoned to this earth from its cosmic lair? The new WT is tops in all respects except the Brundage-less covers."

Imitating Lovecraft?

Martin Alger writes from Mackinaw City, Michigan: "*The Return of Hastur* was the best story in the March WT. It seemed obvious that Derleth was imitating Lovecraft, but if he can turn out yarns that good, I don't mind. *Fearful Rock* is O.K. so far. *The Metal Chamber, The Swine of Aeaea, The Quest of Iranon* and *The Devils of Po Sung* were all good readable stories. *The Stratosphere Menace* and *Smoke Fantasy* I did not like. Seabury Quinn's *The House Where Time Stood Still* was about the usual Jules de Grandin quality, never bad but never extra good. While on the subject of de Grandin I think that small cut of him inserted in the stories would be perfect for a seven-foot Viking, but a small Frenchman, well— Edmond Hamilton's *Comrades of Time* was a

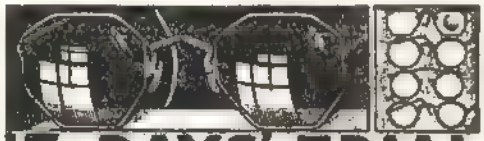
lot like his *The Six Sleepers* in the October, 1935, WT, but enjoyable. The poetry was good, it always is."

"Weird"

Stella M. Wylie writes from San Diego, California: "May I enter the charmed circle of those who read and discuss WEIRD TALES? We have been asked to rate the stories in the order of their appeal to us. It stands to reason we shall not all agree. So Ralph Eadmur Clarry need not take it amiss if I protest his idea as to the kind of tales the word 'weird' calls for. I first decide what the word does *not* call for. To my mind, details that are gruesome, sickening, macabre, are not weird at all. They have an atmosphere of uncleanliness that I find objectionable. My mind does not enjoy the horrible nor profit in its contemplation. After reading two or three such tales, I turn with relief to such a story as *He That Hath Wings,* by Edmond Hamilton and issued in a fall number of 1938. There is a lift to that tale. It is quite as weird, in the sense of strange, above the normal or usual, as those of loathsome type; a type almost forbidden because of their unwholesome suggestion. And one glimpses too in the winged being an inner story of the spirit. Many of the tales do not stay with me. But *He That Hath Wings* with its pathos and loveliness is so descriptive of genius in an unappreciated atmosphere, so figuratively true to the very kind of life that does find itself here on earth, that my memory returns to it again and again. Algernon Blackwood was and is considered the master of such tales, and in this one Hamilton closely approaches him. There is no hint of preaching; nevertheless, the delighted reader is left on a higher plane than if he had not read. So, I arrive at the conclusion that the most effective and desirable weird tales deal not so much with physical sensation as with the mental and spiritual mood that directs the physical. There should be plenty of adventure, of course, but let it be 'high adventure'."

Three Supreme Artists

H. V. Ross writes from London, England: "I see by the December issue of WT that the attempt of a few of the readers to get weird covers in place of the usual sex type seems to be having some success. I have in the past been one of the most consistent advocates of



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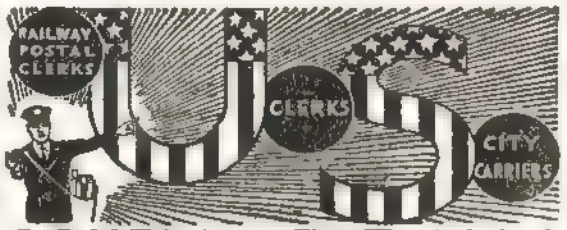

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a purely weird cover, and although the other readers and myself have been more or less 'voices in the wilderness' it does seem as if we have been heard, and editorial policy has veered our way. For myself, I think this is a vast improvement, as the object of the cover must be, or rather should, reflect what is inside, i.e., 'WEIRD TALES.' The December issue was also notable for having items by three supreme artists who will never write again. I refer of course to Howard, Whitehead, and Pendarves; the loss of these with Eadie and Lovecraft seems almost unbearable to a follower of these splendid tale-spinners. Well, we shall now have to rely more than ever on Smith, Quinn, Moore, Bloch, and a few others to maintain the standard of excellence we have been used to in the past. Seabury Quinn, of course, never fails us in this respect. I was also very glad to see the artist Finlay back with us. . . . Quinn's *More Lives Than One* was a winner."

Concise Comments

Frank Roberts writes from London, England: "I think the folklore of my native Somersetshire would give your authors something to bite into for yarns, and it would also give your Scottish Eyrie dweller something to think about."

Cecil Grubb writes from Alton, Illinois: "Seabury Quinn's story *Goetterdaemmerung* was one of the best stories I ever read. Why does he fool around with Jules de Grandin?"

Marjorie Kroehler writes from Denver: "I've just finished reading the April issue of WEIRD TALES and am overwhelmed by the story *The Curse of Yig*, by Z. B. Bishop. The last story by this author, *Medusa's Coil*, I thought the best in a long time, but this one —well, my hat's off to the writer."

Paul N. Nicholaioff writes from Chicago: "Very striking April cover design. I liked it very much. Ghastly tombstones, black trees against a dark blue sky, wreaths of fog floating low over the graves—brr-r-r-r!"

Most Popular Story

Readers, what is your favorite story in this issue? We invite you to write us, not only about the stories you like, but also about those you dislike. Address your letters to the Eyrie, WEIRD TALES, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York. The most popular story in the April issue, as shown by your votes and let-

ters, was C. L. Moore's story of Jirel of Joiry, *Hellsgarde.*

The Stratosphere Menace

Naihtif Nameerf writes from Rochester, New York: "You recently published a story about a Frenchman ascending in a car attached to a balloon into the stratosphere, where a volume of hydrogen and oxygen gas existed in proportion of two to one, with the mad mania of destroying humanity by setting on fire this gas; and you had him, otherwise foiled, desperately attempt it by lighting a paper torch in triumph in the car, and when he opened the door into the outer atmosphere his own life was snuffed out by difference of pressure inside and out and his torch blown out so that it failed to ignite the gasses. Let me call your attention to the fact that anyone who knows anything about chemistry knows that hydrogen will rapidly permeate through any known substance and that the Frenchman's car would therefore have been so filled with hydrogen and oxygen gasses that the moment he lit a match or other light therein he would have blown his car to pieces and ignited the outside gasses." [The story, *The Stratosphere Menace* by Ralph Milne Farley, implied that the mad Frenchman's theory might have been wrong, so that the gasses would not explode after all; which is just what happened.—THE EDITOR.]

To Fame and Fortune

Major-General C. D. Rhodes, Retired, writes from Washington: "In somewhat casually looking through your April number, I am impressed with the general excellence of its contents, and with the thought of what a boon such well-written, well-selected stories of the odd and eery are to the tired business man or woman. Since you ask it of your readers, I would like to especially praise and commend the little human-interest tale, *Mommy,* by one Mary Elizabeth Counselman. The author has certainly a born gift for expressing the dramatic in a few words, and the pathetic interest of the age-old relation between the maternal instinct and childhood holds one to the very end. Give us more of this author's work; she is certainly on the way to fame and fortune."

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The girl saw it first. She cried out and recoiled in trepidation from a swelling, amorphous blot that darkened the snow beneath them. With appalling swiftness the blot rose and flowed toward them, coiling about them like a writhing taint.

In the depths of the shadow something flashed. Bright and swift as a naked crag emerging from snow in a glacial landslide it smote and sundered the twain, hurling the man backward across the snow and lifting the girl from the mountainside.

The girl shrieked and threw out her arms as the bright object curved about her. It enmeshed her limbs and lifted her so swiftly from Earth that when the man picked himself up she was a whirling mote receding into the sky, a dancing midge gleaming in the rays of the incredibly swollen sun.

All about him the wind roared and the snow stirred in mysterious travail. There was a roaring in his ears, an adumbration of half-light that chilled his heart like ice. The entire mountain quaked and trembled. The slope buckled, throwing him forward upon his face and half burying him in snow. He lay moaning and helpless while all about him nature unleashed her furies.

Then, slowly, the mysterious turbulence subsided. The wind died down and the ground ceased to quiver. But though the elements resumed their wonted calm, an aura of intangible menace seemed still to hover over the high Alps, and the silence which ensued was more ghastly than any sound. . . .

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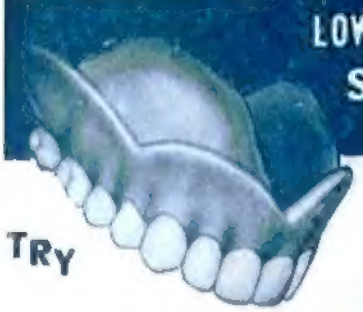

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